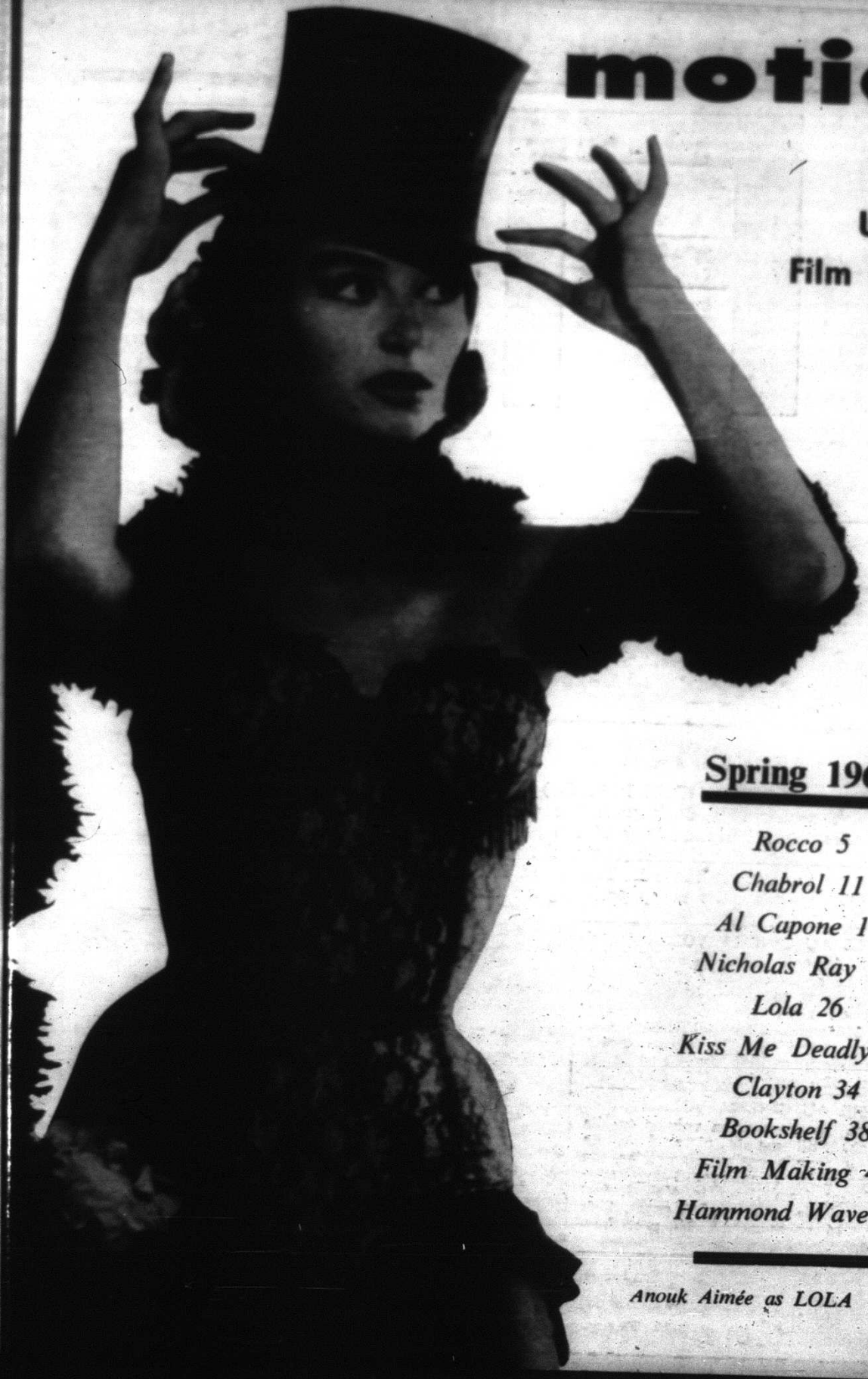

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An Art Form

RAYMOND DURGNAT

THE CINEMA'S claim to art is sometimes disputed on the grounds that art is or ought to be self-expression; and that as commercial films are the product of a consortium of talents working to please a mass, no commercial film can be a work of art.

The commercial cinema is a 'group' art. It is designed to appeal to, and to embody the beliefs, values, hopes and fears of a group, of a culture, rather than those of the artist himself. In being a compendium of many art forms, its nearest relative is opera. In its essentially communal aim, its nearest relative is architecture.

An opera is the product of many creative minds—the composer, the conductor, the singers, the director. Architecture is even more impersonal. Does St. Paul's express Sir Christopher Wren? Maybe. But that is hardly the test of its importance, still less is it its social justification. It expresses a faith, a culture, an era, a set of common spiritual aspirations. In literature there are such poems as 'Sir Gawayne and the Green Knight' — anonymous, but, even if its composition were attributable to one name rather than another, impersonal.

Even the purest of pure artists is not 'free'. His work of art has to communicate to an audience, to arouse echoes, a recognition. In poetry the acceptance of a rhyme-scheme, of a stanza form, indeed, of intelligibility, involves a rejection of total freedom, an acceptance of constraint, of rules, of accident. The artist give way to an arbitrary, formal pattern which readers seem to like. He strives for clarity, brevity, and other desirable aesthetic features — another sacrifice of sovereignty. True, his 'feelings', his unconscious will see to it that his solution to all the problems of craftmanship and communication will be an *expressive* one; indeed his feelings can do so only if he refrains from too rigorous a fidelity to what, consciously, he *thinks* his meaning is. Behind every 'meaning' looms a complex magma of feelings. And the justification of the craftsman's virtues, of rules, in art, is that they protect the artist from what he thinks he means, frustrating easy solutions at every turn, forcing him to outwit himself, to transcend the limitations of his thinking.

Modern art has freed itself from many of the restraints and problems of craftsmanship. So how can artists outwit themselves? By admitting into the creative process the challenge of *accident*.

The commercial film may be 'impersonal' as traditional art is bound by aesthetic rules and as modern paintings and poems increasingly incorporate the roughage of chance.

CONTINUED OVERLEAF

motion

No. 3. SPRING 1962

THE UNIVERSITY FILM MAGAZINE

DIRECTION IAN JOHNSON

EDITOR ALLEN EYLES

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Will readers and especially subscribers - please note that due to exceptional commitments on the time of **MOTION's** *editorial staff during the next few months the next issue of* **MOTION** *will not appear until*

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Subscriptions: 5/6 for three issues

Printed by Hornsey Printers Co. Ltd., 71 Stoke Newington Road, London, N.16 (CLIssold 6842/3)

AN ART FORM - *from page 3*

A cathedral is anonymous, functional, a product of a group of craftsmen speaking for the group of worshippers, through a common set of conventional values. If a cathedral has any claim to be a work of art, so has a commercial film.

In all art there exists a threefold interaction between the artist's urge, the intractability of the medium, and the intractability of the audience's understanding. There may also be a fourth factor —that of function. A cathedral exists not only to express the faithful but also as a place to meet, reflect in, worship and put money into many little boxes. Similarly a commercial film is made not only to express the audience but also to please it, to cheer it up—to say nothing of the money in the little box-offices.

A cathedral however is designed to inspire, uplift, to overawe the worshipper — to contradict many aspects of human nature. The entertainment film performs a similar function. A film which leaves its audience depressed and miserable is, functionally, as anomalous as a cathedral whose paintings imply that the seven deadly sins are rather fun.

Many great religious paintings were executed by laymen in a statee of sin, by hypocrites, heretics and even downright agnostics. Equally, a great film may be produced by an artist who has no personal interest in its 'message', who despises or even dislikes it. Dreyer, yes . . . but there is also Melies, Mack Sennett, Feuillade, Fields, the Marx Brothers, a whole library of names who had no more concern for art as such, in the critics' sense of the term, than any entertainer has.

At its best, the thoroughly efficient, apersonal commercial film attains the eloquence and beauty of a myth. It is the sentiments of a group crystallised into dramatic terms, and shared.

(This article serves in part as an introduction to the analysis of **Kiss Me Deadly** which appears on page 30.)

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FROM PUBLICATIONS DEPARTMENT, BRITISH FILM INSTITUTE,
81 DEAN ST., LONDON, W.1

Ian Johnson

places Visconti's latest film against his earlier works and finds a significant return to reality

Visconti and Annie Girardot on set of "Rocco"
Overleaf: "La Terra Trema"

VISCONTI'S "ROCCO"

ROCCO AND HIS BROTHERS which to my mind represents a magnificent work of art, marks Visconti's return to his earlier period of so-called "neo-realism", after a barren interval of two second-rate near melodramas, and one first-rate melodrama. Eighteen years and twelve years separate *Ossessione* and *La Terra Trema* from *Rocco*, yet *Rocco* is closer in feeling and style to these earlier works, than to any in the intervening period.

Ossessione (1942) is nearly always discussed briefly by critics as the first exercise in neo-realism, and then put to one side. Even if we ignore the fact that in any case the groundwork for neorealism had been laid by Jean Renoir with whom Visconti had worked before the war, I think that by now we can stop considering *Ossessione* as the first of any kind, however revolutionary it may have seemed in its early days, and start considering it as a film in its own right.

Ossessione, then, is a film about escape. The opening credits appear above a shot through the window of a driver's cabin as it approaches the roadside cafe where most of the action takes place, and the rest of the film concerns the enmeshment of Gino, the young man, within this setting and with Giovanna, and his attempts to free himself after the murder of her husband. The earlier scenes of his involvement are played with a deep sense of claustrophobia and spider-webbish entanglement, aided amongst other techniques by dark shadowy lighting and a small depth of field in focussing. *Ossessione* deserves an article to itself, but to be brief, the lovers after a bitter estrangement are reconciled completely when Gino learns of Giovanna's pregnancy by him. The news of the child, he says, "has become liberation for me — in fact I'm another man". This, spoken on a wide and endless beach deliberately (though not self-consciously) stressed by Visconti in one hold contrasts with the darkly-lit scenes of entanglement associated with the cafe. Earlier, semi-escape had been stressed by the sunlight and shadows of a fairground scene and a city romance between Gio and a young prostitute, Lucia. In addition, the irony of the final escape, by car away from the cafe, is emphasised by the fact that the police are put on the tail of the lovers by the child which overhears their reconciliation, while they themselves find satisfaction and happiness by the fact that they are to have their own child.

The success of the film derives much from its realistic setting and the value which Visconti extracts from this. But the film has faults, mainly of characterisation. The police for example are mere caricatures, although this perhaps is intentional, for Visconti is notoriously opposed to authoritarianism, and the film was, after all, made in Fascist Italy. However, the fact that we rarely feel any contact with the lovers is more serious. Our attitude here is one of observation. It may well be that Visconti intended it this way, and I hesitate to criticize on this point; but I should have thought that to be really great *Ossessione* is just the kind of film which needs emotionalism on the grand scale. As it is the emotions are tepid, and neither of the two leading characters really come to life. The real people in this film are Lucia and the Spaniard. But again, one makes allowances, for under the war-time conditions of Italy, it would have been difficult for Visconti to have created two really sympathetic murderers.

LA TERRA TREMA (1948) is quite different from any of Visconti's other works. It is moreover, a very great and very moving work of art. By narrating the story of the failure of a young Sicilian fisherman's effort to free himself from the extortion of the dealers, the middle-men, the film makes a plea for co-operative action, while realising that the time is not yet ripe, that beforehand a change must come to men's minds. Many of its scenes remain indelibly imprinted on the memory: the cries of the fishermen across the water as the lights of their boats scatter reflections in the sea; the young girl telling of her dreams and hopes to the child; the forlorn farewell of the young woman after her tentative match with the builder has failed; the touching conversation across the broken-out hull of the Valestroni family's boat, between 'Ntoni and a young girl: "One day, though, people will understand that I was right. They will realise that the things that have happened to me, the losses I have suffered, have a meaning for them. We must learn to help each other, to work together. It is only then that we will be able to go forward."

If, apart from the very setting of the film, it is difficult to see social criticism in *Ossessione*, with *Rocco, La Terra Trema* remains Visconti's most socially conscious film. Visconti was his own best critic when he explained the dramatic theme of his film "as a direct outcome of the economic conflict. The key to the understanding

of the spiritual and psychological conflicts is always social, even if the conclusions I reach are always those which concern the individuals whose cases I am describing. The yeast, the blood in the veins of history, is always thick with civic passion and social reasoning." (*Films and Filming*, January 1961).

Anybody who has yet to discover that form *is* content, should take a look at Visconti. *La Terra Trema* piles on the layers of meaning thickness by thickness. Over the social theme of the film, Visconti's use of Sicilian settings and local players makes its own comment, while upon these Visconti concentrates on careful (yet casual-seeming) compositions. When, for example, the youngest daughter returns from sleeping with the local policeman (an act fraught with local taboos, and which as the film later points out bars her from marriage) we feel with her, her shame and degradation, yet just how this scene works it is difficult to say with exactitude. It is partly because she returns just as her grandfather is being carried away ill, and that she slips guiltily past the onlookers to one side of the frame. The feeling is confirmed by the subsequent close-up against a blank wall (the boxing-in of the frame thus creating a sense of enclosure, enclosure in this case within the girl's own mind, her own guilt) and her fondling of the necklace which is felt to be both shameful and desirable. As in *Rocco*, Visconti forces us to both associate our emotions with those of the characters, yet to be observers too. In addition to all this, there are the depths of meaning of which Visconti's style makes us constantly aware, and we recognise intellectually that the girl's unhappiness is the result of her brother's failure and in turn of the social environment in which the girl lives. *La Terra Trema* is a film which appeals both to the intellect and to the emotions. Its main weakness lies in depriving the dealers of any subtleties of characterisation — the fault of the policemen in *Ossessione* — which ultimately turns them into something approaching pantomime villains. But set against the whole work, this is a very minor criticism. After *Rocco*, *La Terra Trema* is the greatest of Visconti's films.

Surprisingly, it was followed by three films — two of which were very weak — in which Visconti drifted by stages into worlds increasingly removed from reality, through *Bellissima*, *Senso*, and *White Nights*.

BELLISSIMA (1951) marks the transition from Visconti's realistic works to his fantasies. The blend of realism and unreality in this work was unsuccessful. Maddalena (Anna Magnani) is obsessed with the idea of turning her little girl into a film star. In the pursuit of her dream she makes herself ridiculous, and ends up her dreams smashed, but reconciled with the impossibility of her desires. The film was a clumsy work which lacked the subtlety and lightness of touch the theme so clearly needed. The comedy was not always successful — for example, at an audition a woman faints when she hears the voice of her child, an implausible incident which jarred awkwardly with its realistic setting — and Magnani (an overrated actress) at her histrionic best, swamped the other performances. Nevertheless, the film had its moments (the cut from a cinema screen showing cattle being stampeded across a river to mothers stampeding their children into Ciné-Citta; the phoney but sad scene of mother and daughter alone on a street bench while the sound of music-hall applause drifted from a nearby tent; Magnani's delightful resistance to a seduction on a river-bank), and as always Visconti's technique was superb.

SENSO (1954) was a self-conscious, though largely successful, exercise in the style of the grand opera, while *White Nights*, in which Visconti tried hard to out-Fellini Fellini in sentimentality and failed disastrously, was unquestionable the worst of Visconti's films. As form is content, so the cardboard effects of *White Nights* matched its cardboard emotions. Worse, instead of placing his characters at the centre of the world with everything else revolving around them, as Fellini does, Visconti, out of sympathy with his creations, stands with us at the perimeter and peers inside at his characters, rather as at performing fleas, for us to laugh at. This is shown most clearly, in a dance scene where the film's principle couple are made to appear ridiculous in comparison with the "normal" couples dancing around them.

After departing about as far as he could from reality with *White Nights*, Visconti has done a complete *volte-face* with *Rocco* where he returns to the moods and techniques of *Ossessione* and *La Terra Trema*.

AS IN *La Terra Trema*, the style of *Rocco* is of layers of meaning imposed upon, and blending with, each other. No single aspect of this film is discussable without the others, and nothing is superfluous to the broad theme. It is one of the most perfectly constructed films I have seen. The first half of the film is concerned with establishing setting, social background, the characterisation, relationships, for the violent working out of the second half into which we move with a smooth change of gears, and a quiet, gathering obsessiveness. Just how all this is done, is a matter of skilful directorial

navigation through the flows and eddies of the story.

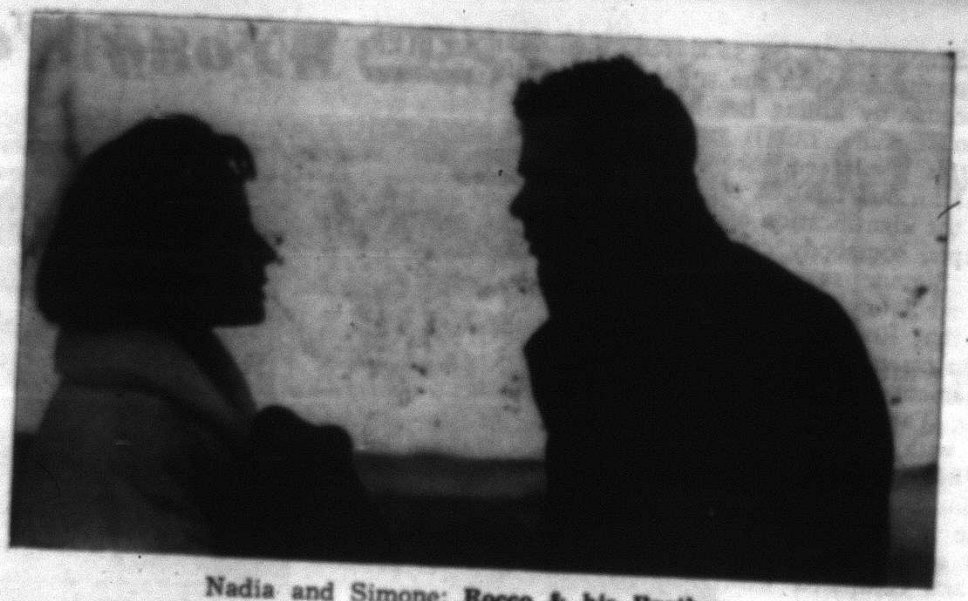
The Parondi family, forced to emigrate North by the poverty of their own land and the greed of the large agriculturalists, slowly disintegrates in the city, mainly through the ambitions of Simone. Upon this basic plot, Visconti subtly brings out the social traditions of the district of the family's roots, their close-knit family solidarity desparately clung to by the mother, and their own ties to the land of the South.

Only at the end (by more or less summing up) through the words of Ciro the second youngest of the brothers, does Visconti make his own overt comment upon the scenes his film depicts. Throughout the rest of the film he makes his conclusions felt, almost subliminally, through the texture and style of the film.

One way in which he does this is by alternate identification with, and observation of, the characters. By "identification" I do not mean in the normal sense that we imagine we actually are the characters on the screen; it is rather more delicate than this, for Visconti forces us to imagine and to understand how his characters feel, while at the same time acknowledging their condition intellectually. Thus, to give a few simple examples... When the Parondis first arrive in Milan, they set out one morning to earn some money shovelling snow. As they leave the basement where they are staying, the mother calls after them not to return without any money. To us this is an amusing comment, and its funniness is emphasised by the accompanying shot which is from her sons' point of view as they laugh at her. But a second later, the shot is from her viewpoint behind the door, and she laughs too, partly through her fondness for her children, and we associate ourselves with her, the more so as her next gesture is the wholly human one to rub herself against the cold. Thus, first we observe, then we associate. Likewise, when Rocco enters the ring at the gymnasium to spar with his brother, the camera concentrates on the trainer's rage at Simone, inside his office, while outside another trainer constantly encourages him to come outside and look at Rocco. While the trainer refuses to look at the fight, we, the audience, feel impatient; as soon as the trainer peers over the partition of his office to look into the ring, much of our impatience vanishes and we too are looking over to see how well Rocco is doing. By now we are associated with the trainer. Once he leaves the office to take a fuller part in the action, we associate fully. As a final example, there is the scene where Nadia, abandoned by Rocco, is approached by Simone. He kisses her despite her resistance. Then there is a cut to the face of Ivo, the young boxer who first told Simone of Nadia's love for Rocco, who gives an unpleasantly knowing grin as if to say "I knew she would give in". We merely observe Ivo's reaction at first, but when Visconti cuts back to show us that Nadia actually *is* responding to Simone, we have to associate ourselves with Ivo and grant the fact he was right!

Now all this sort of thing has several uses. In the first place it constantly draws us into the drama, to absorb us fully with what is going on in the film, without sacrificing our intellectual analysis of the situation. In addition it aids our understanding of character motivation. Visconti does not really condemn anybody, for each character is treated with understanding — even the unpleasant Ivo, who is really seen as part of, and the result of, his social environment: we may be repulsed by him, but we at least know what makes him tick. I have already mentioned that *Rocco* has layers of meaning, and even the above examples illustrate aspects of the complexity of the film. Thus the mother's farewell reflects her hopes for the success and togetherness of her family, the success of Rocco in the ring we know must inevitably affect Simone's position, and the face of Ivo is the face of town, the bad, evil, side of the town. Visconti's attitudes are constantly implicit in the style of the film, even when we are not consciously aware of them.

Visconti's style is extremely economical. In no film of Visconti's is there anything extraneous to the development of the theme in hand. Thus the reviewer for the *Monthly Film Bulletin* who describes "scenes like the rendezvous in the cathedral are [*sic*] cut into by the affected suddeness of an extremely wide- and high-angle long-shot" as "exhibitionism" shows a complete misunderstanding. This particular scene, with Nadia running the length of the cathedral dwarfed against the spires, apart from its completely satisfying aesthetic effect, is also symbolic of the dwarfing of Nadia (who, remember, has just been rejected by Rocco) by tradition and long establishment: i.e. her towny attitudes against the deep-rooted traditions of the Parondi family. Just one more simple example: in the final scene between Ivo and Simone, Simone punch-drunk and wretched learns that Nadia is living down by the river, and decides to attempt a reconciliation. He moves away from Ivo and the camera towards the door, accompanied by Ivo's jibes. As he does so, a couple start to dance in the left of the frame. Chance? Just for the effect? Maybe, but they also represent a stable relationship which not only contrasts with Simone's relations with Nadia, but shows the comparative stability of the town-bred against the country boy who has



Nadia and Simone: **Rocco & his Brothers**

failed to adapt to his new environment. Quite obviously, Simone is not one of these people, he has been rejected. Now while you may not even think about this while you are watching the film, nevertheless it is working subconsciously.

Visconti has been accused of injecting an excess of violence into his theme, yet, again, it is absolutely essential. Other writers have pointed out that the subsequent relationship between Nadia, Simone, and Rocco is meaningless unless the rape is depicted in its full brutality. The fight scene which follows, too, is vital to audience objective/subjective reaction, for it acts as a psychological purgative after the intense emotionalism of the preceding rape (suggested, incidentally, in the present cut version by a long-held close up of Rocco's face, a powerful indication of this actor's brilliant performance and the soundness of Visconti's direction). The fight is an emotional escape valve for both the characters and the audience. Prove this by imagining the film with the rape scene, but without the fight: apart from any other plot essential, we would feel dissatisfied and upset.

Another of the charges against Visconti is his overt symbolism, especially in the stabbing scene where Nadia opens her arms in the shape of a cross. In the first place it is worth nothing that there is a certain amount of symbolism in *Rocco* which critics have failed to draw attention to, simply because it is "invisible". One example here: as Ivo finishes describing Nadia's love for Rocco to Simone, he holds in extreme close up a hyperdermic needle. This is in fact so close to the lens that it is rendered transparent, and practically unnoticeable. This may be interpreted either as phallic, or more probably, as a symbol of spite and evil. Now when Visconti decides to bring his symbolism out into the open, we may be sure it has a very special importance. I am inclined to think that the symbolism of the paintings on the television screen during the interplay between Simone and the homosexual, is too exaggerated and may be one of the few flaws in this film, even though I personally did not find it dissatisfying. But the stabbing of Nadia is wholly satisfying, has an extremely complex significance, and is of vital importance to the actual meaning of the film.

At the supper held at the Parondis' home to celebrate Rocco's victory in the ring, Rocco is asked to propose a toast. He refuses, but then makes a disjointed speech which concludes as follows: "You remember how when they begin to build a house down there, they throw a stone in the shadow of the first passer by..." Here he is interrupted by Luca, who asks, "Why..." And the reply comes, "Because a sacrifice is needed to make the house good and solid". There is a cut to the face of Cirro who turns to look at a photo on the wall beside him. The camera quickly pans to follow his glance, and rests on the squashed face of Simone in the ring. The doorbell rings, we know it is Simone... The significance of this cannot be overestimated. First, it is Cirro who is chosen throughout the film, and especially at the end, to represent an understanding of the family's situation, and one of the solutions for the immigrant from the South. Thus, his glance at the photograph can only mean that he understands that Simone must be sacrificed if the Parondi family is to be made "good and solid". In fact, this ties in with what he does and says for the rest of the film.

But if Simone is to be sacrificed, then his sacrifice commences with the ritual stabbing of Nadia, because by killing her he brings about his final misfortune. But it isn't as simple as that, for this whole sequence is cross-cut with Rocco's victorious fight, a cross-cutting which results in the identification of Rocco with Nadia (for example, somebody calls to Rocco "cover up", and Simone says to Nadia "cover up" almost immediately afterwards). It is also made apparent that Rocco imagines his opponent in the ring to resemble Simone, and that the boxing tournament becomes a fight against Simone by Rocco. Thus the final k.o. in the ring is cross-cut with the stabbing of Nadia. The defeat of "Simone" in the ring, is paradoxically the end for Simone when he kills Nadia. Moreover, the identification between Nadia and Rocco is complete. Rocco has been called an "angel" and compared with "Saint Rocco" in the film, Nadia stretches out her arms in the shape of a cross. Yet before she is killed, Nadia spits out all her hate and revulsion for Simone, just as Rocco is hating his "Simone" in the ring. Yet can it be, that Rocco hates Simone, after all his professed love, his efforts to save Simone?

The answer is that in fact part of him does. This is made clear in an earlier scene, where seated on a staircase, he sobs out the truth that he imagined his opponent in the ring to look like Simone, and that it was Simone he was fighting. But this does not make his efforts to save Simone, his declared affection for Simone, hypocritical. His resistance against his real hate springs from his family environment and upbringing. He *feels* it is wrong to hate his brother — hence the confused sobbing on the staircase. He has been brought up in Southern Italy, and by his mother, with intense feelings of family loyalty: after Simone has raped Nadia and goads him to fight, he appeals to the onlookers, "How can I? — He's my brother!"

Yet, strangely, the final act of Nadia is to kiss Simone, and to the end Rocco tries to protect his brother; ultimately two things count for Rocco, his love for his brother, which is sometimes confused with his hate, psychologically, and his family ties.

Seen in this light, Nadia's death is a beautiful self-sacrifice; a supreme act of identification with her lover. Yet in a typically Visconti style, she regrets this a moment later, once she is stabbed and reality floods back, when she sobs "I don't want to die". But as Suso Cecchi D'Amico, who wrote the screenplay with Visconti explained: "Nadia represents the town. She is good, corrupt, everything." (*Film*, Winter 1961.)

TO PAGE 34

LETTER *Wrong War?*

COULDN'T AGREE LESS about the qualities of *Le Passage du Rhin*. It stumbles along, heavily loads the dice against the bad one of the pair and thumps home its thesis with such subtleties as the Betrayed Maiden, the Bereaved Mother and all.

The plot contains serious weaknesses. Why on earth does Jean love Florence, who spends the wartime sleeping with his rival, a collaborator? One has to accept this affair at face value since it is completely unconvincing and the lady makes so many changes of costume that one keeps wondering whether she isn't a different one. And why does Roger come back to greet without a word of reproach the 'friend' who played such a dirty trick on the German girl who trusted him?

These things would not matter if the theme of the film was an important one. But if Cayatte is making a plea for internationalism or the importance of human decency versus schoolboy heroics, he has surely made his film about the wrong war.

Roger, sitting in the burgermeister's office and chatting with the old folks, has surely never heard of concentration camps! Nor, obviously, have any of the gemütliche villagers. They are just innocents caught up in a war, whilst people who join the Free French are . . . schoolboys?

Cayatte's film expresses the same moral disorientation as that infinitely greater work, *Hiroshima, Mon Amour*. Didn't a French teenage girl in wartime know what happened to women who spent their nights with soldiers who were torturing her compatriots during duty hours? Another batch of Jews went up in smoke while Roger was smoking his pipe and not even asking himself whether he ought not to go home and fight for internationalism and human decency.

The diamonds of Liberation have turned into the ashes of the Fifth Republic. And, in an inarticulate way, these French film makers seem to be asking, "Why did we fight the war, if what we won was the Indo-China War, the Algerian War and a threatened civil war?"

But, this should not lead one to conclude, as Cayatte does, that diamonds are ashes. If all of us had acted like Roger, Cayatte would not be making films about humanism and we would not be here discussing his films.

If French film makers don't want, or are not able, to probe the political reasons for victory having turned sour on them, they had better leave the whole subject alone. Or if they want

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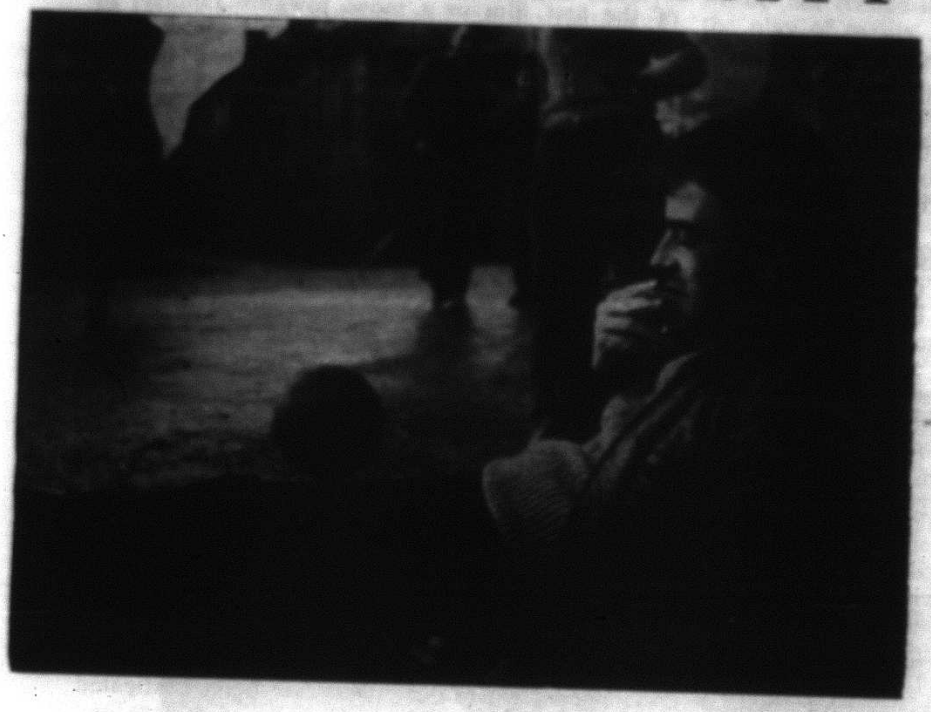
THE NECESSITY FOR LOVE



Structure and themes in five films of

CLAUDE CHABROL

by Gavin Millar

'What else is there? Love? Yes . . . Love.'

BENEATH wintry trees by a lakeside, Jacqueline, last of the '*bonnes femmes*', exchanges, with her knight-in-armour, these sadly misunderstood, tragically ironic words. 'Don't you trust me?' he asks her, 'Yes,' she smiles gently, 'I do.' Moments later she dies in ecstasy in his arms.

Here, in its most moving form till then, is the heart of Chabrol's first five films: the apparent impossibility and the undeniable necessity of love. In a search for it, the nature of love becomes distorted, its power perverted and instead of life it breeds destruction. It is in an attempt to pull this pessimistic conviction towards the light that Chabrol adopts the framework of sacrifice and redemption. The course of our lives is seen to be a double process in which self-knowledge grows hand in hand with the ability to love. Unfortunately, when the knowledge is imperfect, so is the love, and it is often the case that some terrible sacrifice will have to be made so that others can see their way to both.

At times the opposition between the observable facts and the contrived interpretation threatens to pull the film apart. But at his best, and for me that means recently, Chabrol has penetrated to the level where the two are necessarily joined, and the result is strong, lyrical film-making with the full bitter-sweet flavour of its root paradox: the play of appearance and reality, the danger and necessity of love before understanding.

In the face of a comfortable army of rubber-stampers it is probably indiscreet to maintain that Chabrol's first film was his weakest, and certainly, Christian symbolism or no, no more 'serious' or 'worthwhile' than his others. The film so subtly condones your moral sympathies that you don't notice it. Where there should be intelligence and feeling from the spectator, there is, I suspect, only the warm gullibility of the liberal who, once hooked, is too ready to accept Chabrol's schematisation as life, since it is careful to have no truck with blacks and whites, is sparing of event and glamour to the extent that outbursts of animal violence are accepted as local colour, and appears to add metaphysical depth to its neo-realist surface by enjoining a battle of carelessly investigated minds athwart the physical struggles.

The best of *Le Beau Serge* is the first third before the claims of the structure lead us into deep waters and shallow parallels. The description of the village dance is fine too: accurately observed detail, the authentically second-hand flavour, the suspicion that these people could be enjoying themselves in a more appropriate way.

Above: **Le Beau Serge**

But, with the quarrel and fight, the documentary tautness evaporates, for ever.

2

It is the growth of his ability to observe, and contrive in accordance with it, which marks Chabrol's later films. *Les Cousins*, as he acknowledges, is the second half of the diptych. The hint of sacrifice and redemption is not so strong here, but at least its structure precludes the suggestion that Chabrol's world is ruled by chance. Short-term accidents provoke destiny but cannot change it. The tragedy must be that Charles is *bound* to be worthy, dull, ineffectual, is bound in fact to go under, while the attractive and amoral Paul, nourished and cosseted by the world he helps to make, survives, brittle, suave and desperately jealous of the self-knowledge which made Charles so out of place in it.

The reversal of responsibility is not substantially different from that intended in *Le Beau Serge*. Now, however, the film flows with the spontaneity of natural event—the observed surface of life—while at the same time Chabrol has been able to incorporate the exactly relevant people and things in the structure he wants. In a sense, Clovis and the foolish Italian are projections of tendencies inherent in Paul. The armoury of weapons, the toy soldiers, the transfixed butterflies and dissected frogs, the opulent decadence of the flat, are fine images of Paul's sensual cruelty. But while no sympathy is shown for the egregious Clovis, (ejecting a dark student, scattering chessmen, whipping a bust of Voltaire), there is something agreeable and pathetic about the presentation of Paul. Slumped in a chair, a murderer, he commands a retrospective tragic sympathy, for we see that he is as lost as François was at the rape of Marie; perhaps more so, for he has no inkling of the kind of framework inside which such an event as his slaughter of Charles would have revelance or could be evaluated. If Francois was in the process of substituting one set of ill-informed views for a better, Paul is now at the very beginning of a road which may perhaps lead him to his first. 'Why should we work when tomatoes ripen by themselves?' he cries to Florence and Charles. For the first time, the tomatoes have stopped ripening.

And by the same token, honest, worthy, industrious Charles is not wholly to be admired, for he provokes his own failure. The smile we take at him writing home to mother is not cruel but it is justified, for the simple truth is that he continues to look elsewhere for his standards of behaviour than by reference to the society in which he is living. It is this, and not his devotion to his mother, which is comic and pathetic.

Nevertheless, they say, it must be less serious than *Le Beau Serge:* the plot turns on co-incidences. What has happened is that Chabrol has shed the acute and ultimately meaningless realism of the first film in a move towards fantasy, in which the growth of emotions and opinions is represented as if it were the drama of 'real' people. ('Reality' of this nature, after all, is a relative norm agreed by convention to describe a certain level of psychological and factual plausibility).

As this process develops in Chabrol it goes hand in hand with a gathering ability to work in terms of pure cinema rather than according to the dictates of a literary framework, which *Le Beau Serge* basically employs. An ability to make the plastic qualities of the image eloquent in a way in which hill, pond, ice, snow and bare branches never really were in *Le Beau Serge* is canalised in a more powerful expression of personal conflicts. The vertiginous pan round Charles' dark room, and the entrancing movement with Paul by candlelight and Wagner tell us more about the two men and their powers of attraction than we could have expected. The effect of this, as always, is to loosen our tenacious reliance on the plausibility of the story-line. As Chabrol's films have grown less 'realistic' or 'literary', and more cinematically dazzling, most critics have concluded that they have less to say. We are at about that stage in the cinema where our cubists are being castigated for breaking the natural rhythm of a jaw-line. They are only doing it, after all, to find out what the jaw is made of. After fifty years of describing it, of illustrating stories tastefully, it is time we did that.

3

No one will pretend that *A Double Tour* is the answer. But there is more to be enjoyed and admired in it than the arrogant glance will discover. The autobiography had gone from *Les Cousins*, but the search for love and its discovery at the expense of life and pain is still the centre of the film. And it is too in *A Double Tour*. But where there was sociology before, as a French critic has said, there is now mythology. It is true that the story of middle-aged Henri and his infatuation by the unearthly beauty of Léda who lives next door to his ugly country mansion in a cool Japanese aquarium-house of ravishing elegance must clearly not be taken as social realism. Some of the complaints made here about its implausibility have a kind of high and formal Martian irrelevance about them that is a delight in itself.

If it were a social study the focus would be the decadence of the bourgeoisie or the emergence of the new classless hero-anarch. But in fact the centre is a relationship (apparently not there) between Richard the insane and Léda the unearthly. In each of Chabrol's films a failure or distortion of love leads to a catastrophe (in the case of *Les Godelureaux* Arthur's 'rebirth' is the

equivalent) for which all parties are responsible This is a tale of the pursuit of love and beauty, the failure of that pursuit, and the destruction of love and beauty by those who have been denied them.

Considerations of conventional morality are even more out of place than they usually are. In the first place it is unlikely that Henri and Laszlo would be acquainted, let alone friendly. (Elizabeth is a red-herring). The unknown antecedents of Léda, Laszlo and his pal are intentionally so, not carelessly so. Laszlo performs his function as the projection of the natural man stifled in Henri. It is he who eats enormously, who drinks outrageously, who has known Léda in Japan vaguely,

and who urges Henri to escape. He is as much Henri's 'alter ego' as he is himself. But 'as much' is not enough. There *are* delicious irruptions of fantasy appropriate to myth throughout: the lightning which floods the house before the apprehension of Richard is of an ugly and improbable pink. It is no natural manifestation but a herald of the apocalypse, the lightnings of the Götterdämmerung. When taunted to say what Léda means to him Henri says simply, like a man inspired by the Sybil, 'elle est ma joie'. It is the kind of sentence characteristic of the latest Chabrol and Gégauff, and it is fatal to give it psychological reference. Like Ronald's explanation of his conduct in *Les Godelureaux*—'he moved my car'—it is sufficient because its logic is that of another world. But only another world in the sense that it is the one in which we live but which we do not recognise. Hence Chabrol's interest in the play of reality and appearance.

But in *A Double Tour* there is a confusion of styles which grows from an inability completely to transcend the source material. For example, the opposition to this pursuit of love and beauty finds its instrument in a mental invalid whose motives spring from a flaw susceptible, oh horrors, simply to psychoanalysis. It is disappointing to find your mythology snuffed out by a mental disease, even if it is an Oedipus complex. The two worlds, of distraught love and loyally pursued love, do not impinge. Not until the two later films are they successfully shown to be interdependent, so that the sacrifice I mentioned as the imposed framework is seen to be an integral part and a necessary function of the regeneration of love.

A Double Tour is certainly flawed by incongruities of this nature. But we are looking at it in the wrong way if we cannot feel the opposition, for example, of those two houses: the one contorted, bursting with functionless ramifications, looking owlishly out on the warm meadows through its jaundiced stained-glass eyes; the other, cool, clean and beautiful, a perfect design for living, a perfect house for beauty. We are looking at it in the wrong way if we cannot feel the delicacy with which Julie, the milkman and the gardener comment mutely on the central relationship, or the ineffable beauty by which an odd cut

Photo: **Les Bonnes Femmes**

to a startled peacock, rustling its feathers in alarm, can express, more than the action itself, the startled grace of Léda in the moment of death. We have surely missed something if we cannot see the opposition between the soberly-clad Richard and his involuted musical organs in darkened rooms, and the vibrant browns, oranges and golds which surround Léda.

The Chabrol spiral, by which the lead-protagonist is immersed in an unexpected fate and swung clear again, is here echoed in the very mechanics of the plot. The double flashback reveals not only the hidden face of reality; it also echoes the therapeutic process through which Richard must go towards sanity, and it underlines the paradox which again is at the core. He finds Léda not ugly as he expected vice to be, but beautiful. He concludes that she is virtue. But she is his enemy. She must die. 'You have murdered beauty,' Henri tells the unknown assassin who is his own son.

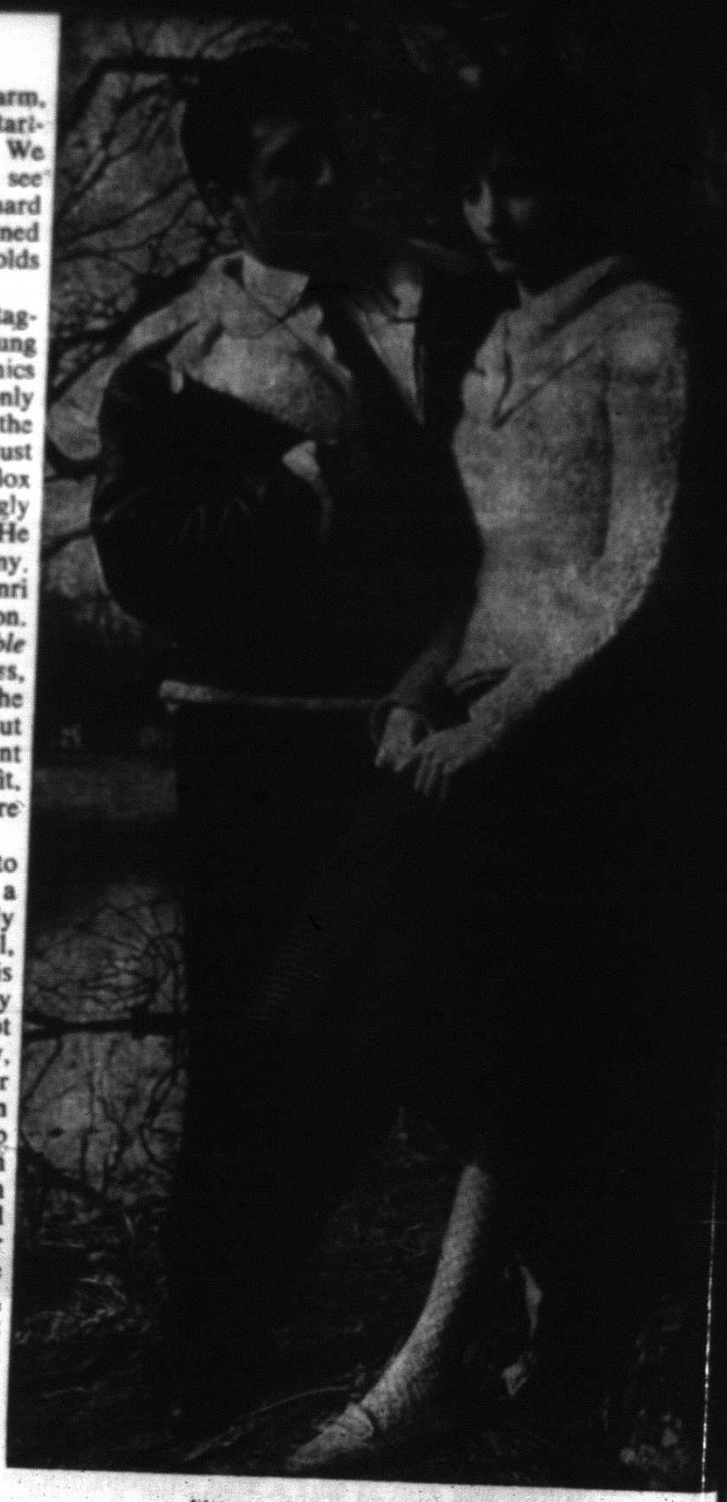
If we feel uncomfortable at the end of *A Double Tour* it is not because the exercise is pointless, but that what was potentially fine has missed. The last shot has vestiges of an elegiac pathos about it. But the shot fails, perhaps because the emergent 'hero', the one whom the sacrifice should benefit, has not the weight to carry our allegiance. There is no one else.

If this sounds like comic language in which to talk about a film which most people consider a trifle, just let us acknowledge that it is precisely this transference, adroitly engineered by Chabrol, which is responsible for any trace of catharsis you may happen to experience at the end of any of his films. What do *you* feel (granted you accept it) when Serge bursts out in a great shout of joy, perhaps for the first time in his life? or when, for the first time, you see Paul *alone*, defeated, even moved? or when the unknown girl looks shyly up for the first time into the unseen face of the man who may be her husband or her hunter? or when Arthur meets Ambroisine on the jetty, and instead of ignoring her, or falling at her feet, treats her for the first time simply like a human being he had once known? If the film has worked at all, I fancy you should feel an involuntary outpouring of tenderness and care and sympathy. Love, in fact, is the word.

4

Love is the word too for the *Bonnes Femmes*. It is the subject of their conversation and the motive of their leisure activities. Forever sought, forever elusive, love often reveals itself as the most terrifying reality behind apparance yet. In this case, Death.

Les Bonnes Femmes is the saddest of Chabrol's films, and the most hopeful. The spiral which operates in all the others brings forth at last the protagonist, however changed, with whom we had begun. *Les Bonnes Femmes* is the least personalised of all because the individuality of the protagonists here is seen to be nothing. They fade to insignificance beside the pulse of life which spawns them, sees them die, and watches them, with equal equanimity, reborn. In fact, by



Above: **Les Bonnes Femmes**
(Jacqueline and her motor-cyclist)

Bernadette Lafont, Jean Claude Brialy:
Les Godelureaux.

the most startling transference of all, we emerge here with a protagonist whom we have never before seen. It seems to me that a film-maker who can *crown* our emotion following the death of Jacqueline with a silent, lyrical observation of a girl we know nothing about deserves better than our abuse. Unlike Richard, this 'inconnue' carries us unequivocally with her. She is not Jacqueline, nor Rita nor Ginette. But her future will be devoted to the same pursuit, and almost certainly, the same failure.

Who can blame the girls' confusion? Their 'mother', the cashier, treasures a bloody fetish as the relic of her love. Their 'father', the manager, casts himself daily in the role of the deceived lover of Carmen in order to pursue his nymphet-molestation. The world, their customers, are either angry dotards or crazed poets, while the honest, dull, loyal little messenger-boy, whose love and resilience are the strongest of all, seems to bear little relation to the knight on the white charger they have been led to expect. What is it the crazed poet sings? Of 'Priapus et St. Pierre'—to sacred and secular love. The absurdity of his pretensions is a token of their inability to make a synthesis of these contradictory manifestations of love. 'Men', snorts one of them, 'don't talk about men and love in the same breath'.

It is this terrifying dichotomy, as it were, into which the motor-cyclist dives. He exploits aptly the vulnerability which their double vision promotes. For he is himself the victim of a warped vision which sees woman at once as a goddess and a toy. As Richard had killed beauty and love whose power he feared, so the motor-cyclist kills Jacqueline. Two distorted views of love in collision bring death and not life.

The brisk opposition of atmospheres — the claustrophobic aquarium of the shop, the prison-zoo, the prison-swimming-pool, the hellish night-club and music-hall — in which we are as much prisoners ourselves because we are hypnotic spectators as the girls are, prepares us for the apparent relaxation and real menace of the escape into the country. We watch the unravelling of the fetish, too, we watch the cavortings of the stripper, and we gasp with relief when we are saved by the god of the spring-board. Eventually, we look at the unknown girl with the intense scrutiny we reserve for our own images in the mirror. We look for a sign of love in her face with the hope which she is looking for it in the face of her unseen partner.

15

A later stage of reality made fantasy receives fine expression in *Les Godelureaux*. We have abandoned autobiography, social criticism, even the framework of conventional morality (though not moral considerations) and have moved to a stage where fantasy is used, not as in *A Double Tour* for its own charm, or as in *Les Bonnes Femmes* in order to achieve a depersonalised, universal statement of the search for love and self-knowledge, but as an immediate expression of the growth of a mind. The theme, however, is, the same, and the structure, a more optimistic, less Christian extension of the cycle of sacrifice and redemption than we have yet had. Arthur, the type of all gauche adolescents (his natural French polish shouldn't confuse us) is taught to look at himself, and to begin to define love and in so doing, by some miracle (literally) he becomes a man.

I find Arthur a more 'real' creation than Ronald, as I find Ronald a more 'real' creation than Ambroisine. Because this is a more fluid, direct and imaginative cinema than we are used to, it is able to throw together creations from different levels of consciousness, and set them in motion in *apparently* the same physical world. This has been done often enough in literature, agreed. But there is a peculiar hypnosis operative in the cinema (simply because part of its material is Photos of Real People) which makes fundamentalists of us all. If I see Jean Claude Brialy dressed 'au chinois' and fondling a dove, however absurdly, I am hard put to it not to believe in his phenomenological existence. And yet we know the cinema has this power to present states of mind, revolutionary hordes, the smell of a rose, as *people*, and by virtue of the symbolic power of the image and

the sensuous communicative flow from the screen, even as things. Ronald, of course, is not a camp young aesthete who lives in a jungle of chic antique with another camper — *simply*. He is an avatar of Arthur: the embodiment of all that Arthur, at the beginning of the film, thinks he would like to be. He is the *appearance* of maturity. The course of the film is the process— the spiral again — by which Arthur is immersed vicariously in the activity of his god, sees that activity pointless, and emerges as a sane and healthy man (cf. his behaviour on the jetty).

There are obvious parallels with *Les Cousins*. Arthur loses his illusions (without the explicit aid of Balzac) in the same way as Charles, but is able to survive it in a way in which Charles is not. The pathos which Chabrol pours on Paul is absent here. Paul, as Ronald, has become a joke, even a state of mind, or less, simply a wish to be fulfilled. When Arthur's apprenticeship is complete the avatar disappears. *Les Godelureaux* is a return to the personal story which *A Double Tour* and *Les Bonnes Femmes*, in an access of escapism and pessimism, had abandoned. So it is an optimistic step.

It is also hilariously funny in a way in which *Les Cousins* never was. From the moment when Ronald appears, incongruously alert, incongruously urbane, in the Quartier Latin, we know we are in a country of the mind. Before long he creates the instrument of his revenge—Ambroisine (the food of the gods). And it will be seen that the revenge Ronald has on Arthur, ironically, is the imposition of the type of experience it is necessary for Arthur to have, quite simply, to prevent him from becoming a Ronald.

Ronald, with the omniscience of the satanic, is familiar with the usual array of adolescent spectres. Against them he manifests a cultivated anarchy which is irresistible to the eager Arthur. Hence the bomb plot. Together they send up the snob-art world, 'charity' society, bourgeois hypocrisy in love, bourgeois absurdity at table, contemporary preoccupations with identity and property—the whole range of Aunt Sallys in fact against which the adolescent flings himself. There comes a point at which Ronald and Arthur diverge, and our sympathy is claimed for Arthur. It comes perhaps at the orgy (I know Arthur isn't there) when Ronald cries: 'We must smash the good things in life'. I think this is not irony, nor the insidious voice of the extreme left, but an invitation from Chabrol to put anarchy in perspective. It needn't be chaos.

The gauge of Arthur's disenchantment from unqualified anarchy is of course Ambroisine, and his relations with her. The nearer he moves to her the further in the face of society they will fly: think of the pram joke as an index of anarchy and invented love. The impossibility of their marrying is heightened by the extreme lyricism of the setting in which it is discussed (the alps). But it is some time before he is aware that she is not love at all but narcissism.

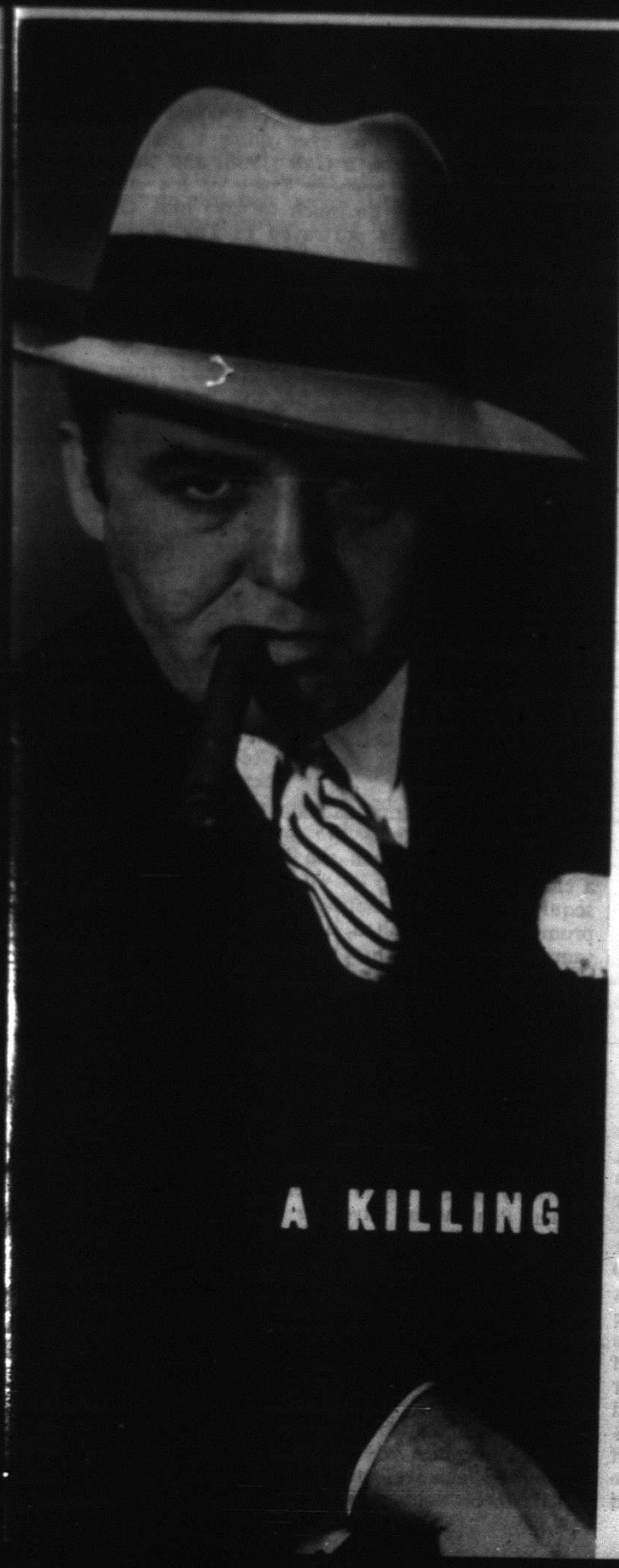
6

There has been little space in all this for talk of style: of the *way* in which we know Chabrol's meaning. It is inadequate perhaps to say that his control was never more sure. There is an odd illogical cut in *Les Godelureaux* to a BCU of Ambroisine's eyes staring out us over the back of a sofa, a small Ronald elegantly seated in the background. It is not called for, it is not explained, nothing happens in it. But it is as powerful and attractive a moment as you will have with the devil and his familiar.

There is a lesson in this too. It could be said that the decadence of *Les Godelureaux* appears to attract Chabrol more than the growth, and that the centre of interest rests in the mercurial but dead identities of Ronald and Ambroisine. This is fine when the two protagonists are comfortably grey — as they are in *Les Cousins* where the evil is shared with the sympathy, and when the sacrifice is made it is all forgotten in the pleasant shock of loss. But here the hero is left with us, and this kind of transference of affection and centre of gravity demands a very positive show of worthiness on the part of the unequivocal hero. I'm not sure we get it.

Again there is no one else. Ambroisine disappears on a wave of high fantasy because, since Arthur has no more need of her, she no longer exists save as an aberration in his mental development. It is Arthur's wit which consigns her to a vehicle, to his mind, appropriate to her value—an American destroyer which doesn't exist either. As for Ronald: he was never more than an Arthur who might have been: an anarchic adolescent who laid a glittering patina of cultivated disenchantment over his universe before he had time to see the worth hidden in the successive disillusionments of youth, and from that time live on behind the barrier. He is only more real than Ambroisine by the margin of having created her himself. When the familiar dies, the devil retires. Consigned with them, perhaps to a Trappist oblivion, goes the Young Man whose faceless, mindless, chameleon inactivity is the emblem of their nihilism.

The sacrifices made in the earlier films are large, grand or tragic. Arthur's sacrifices are less dramatic, more attenuated, even more amusing, but for the first time, at least they are not fruitless. He does see the value of disenchantment before it is too late, and he is content to consign Ambroisine to her American dream and to allow Ronald to gyrate endlessly in his vortex of baroque evil. He has outgrown them both.



A KILLING OR TWO

A look at some gangster films

by ALLEN EYLES

IT WAS a strange time in American life (begins the commentary of one gangster film). And a happy one for Hollywood. The camera moves laterally, parallel to a beer parlour hostess as she descends some stairs, and then follows her deep into the set. She takes up with a man at the counter of the saloon, but the camera passes on, past the Free Food counter, past the "Last Drinks Jan 14th" signs, and on to take in the entry of a young hood called Al Capone. The opening near-silence, then the calm, reasoned commentator, now the deft blend of period music with less comfortable intimations (as the camera retraces its track with Capone's advance and the credits play) are hints later to be taken up of the approach behind Richard Wilson's *Al Capone* (1959): an authoritative reflection not only on Prohibition itself, or the careers of the public enemies, but on Hollywood's treatment of this subject.

Of course, Billy Wilder and I. A. L. Diamond laughed aloud when they wrote *Some Like It Hot* (1959). From the opening hearse with its punctured coffin full of booze, to the funeral parlour where a button on the organ oozing its sedate music allows a steady procession of mourners access to the "Sweet Georgia Brown"s and the frenetic Charlestons of the hidden speakeasy; then the raid which finds Spats Colombo, boss of South Side, delicately sipping milk (and the subsequent massacre of Toothpick Charlie, the stool pigeon, and friends in a garage on St. Valentine's Day, played almost straight); and so to the final glorious set piece, the annual convention in Florida of the Friends of Italian Opera — this is all the way splendid, certain satire. Spats, an opera lover himself (*Rigoletto* is his favourite) naturally attends the conference, presided over by one Little Bonaparte who, in his review of a successful year, recalls sadly the demise of Toothpick Charlie: they had once been choirboys together. Thereafter, when a huge birthday cake enscribed "Happy Birthday, Spats" is wheeled in only four months prematurely, Spats is unfortunately too slow to act before, as the delegates reach the climactic moment in their rendering of "For He's a Jolly Good Fellow" the lid pops off and Johnny Paradise — a coin-spinning take-off of George Raft's early role in *Scarface* — machine-guns him down. Little Bonaparte winces at the high decibel level and turns down his hearing aid.

Left: Rod Steiger as Al Capone

The circumstances behind *Al Capone* are somewhat different. The director has accepted the limitations of the script which rehashes the old clichés with a thin varnish of real names and actual events to prop up elaborations such as the Fay Spain role. Rather than adopt the prevalent practice of playing up certain scenes, Wilson has imposed on the script a considerable sense of style, continually highlighting with a vivid imagination the many familiar scenes to remarkable ironic effect.

The portrait of the gangster is, of course, one of Hollywood's richest myths, the complement of the Westerner that Peter Cowie wrote about in the last issue. The pure, almost puritanical (asexual) code of honour of the U-certificate cowboy contrasts sharply with the A-certificate dramatisations of the speakeasy age, barely more direct about sex but studying in close-up (with sociological pretensions) figures of evil. To some extent, these indigenously American genres have moved towards one another — the western adopting glib psychology and brutality while the endless repetitions of the gangster biopics have taken the edge off the horrors, making them if not romantic then certainly enjoyable when deployed with a sense of style.

What does the gangster's portrait consist of? In fact, the three gangster films that the histories of cinema always take up — *Little Caesar* (1930), *Public Enemy* (1931) and *Scarface* (1932) — contain all the familiar elements. *Public Enemy* depicts the education of the young hoodlum... it's 1909 and two lads are sent to get the jug filled at the family liquor store, the Red Oak Social Club (motto on wall: "Don't spit, remember the Jamestown flood!"), where they fall in with the bad company of one Paddy Ryan who impresses them by singing dirty ditties at the piano, while maybe his habit of nonchalantly eating potato crisps out of a large bowl had something to do with it. At home, Momma (that hideously sweet confection from Al Jolson's *The Jazz Singer)* worries her heart out (Scarface bullies his sister so, and where does the money come from) but she dutifully makes his favourite spaghetti and nurses her worries so that when Jimmy (Public Enemy) Cagney's elder brother returns permanently disabled from the war and refuses to share the fruits of the young criminal's success, symbolised by a huge keg of beer central to the dining table, it's far too late to save junior. The War Hero is ridiculed here, but other scriptwriters found him a victim of circumstances doomed for a tragic end. Poor Franchot Tone was even quite a pacifist before *They Gave Him a Gun* (1936) and then not even his buddy Spencer Tracy or his girl Gladys George could do much to save him. Of three wartime friends portrayed in *The Roaring Twenties*, a vivid recap of 1939, two rise to become opposing gang bosses, while the third is merely a humble lawyer trying to expose the one uppermost. The other reforms, saves the lawyer's life by extinguishing his old rival, and gets a sweet smile of gratitude from the lawyer's wife whom he too had once loved...

Postwar unemployment, then, breeds the bitterness; and Prohibition permits its exploitation. Al Capone arrives at a fortuitous moment in Chicago, 1920.

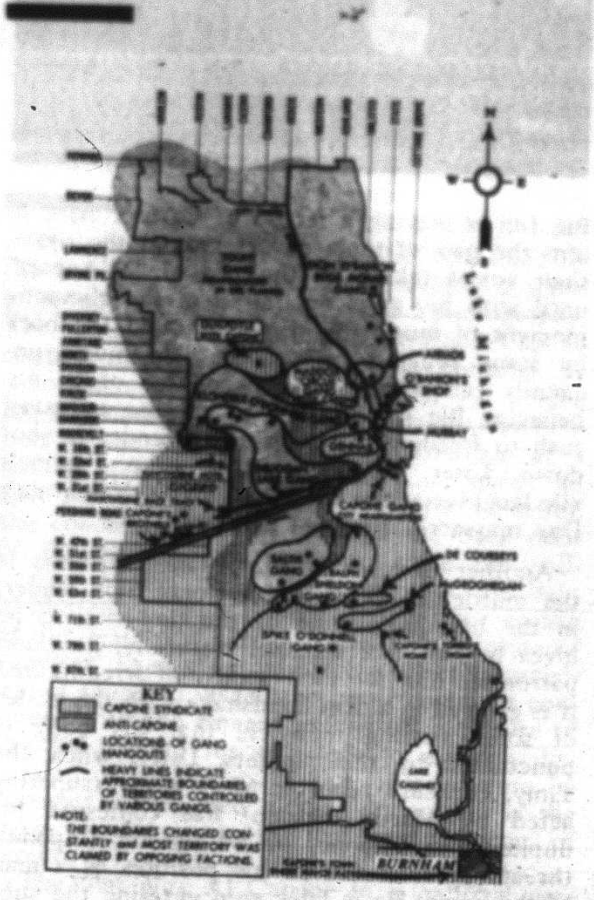
The route to power is always the same: replace the boss. Osgood Perkins' weasel-like Lovo "makes his speech" backed by the strong arm of Paul Muni's Scarface (Al Capone in all but name) clouting the principal dissentient, and is later himself edged out of the Presidency of the Social Club and control of the liquor rackets. By this time Scarface is too big to do more than enjoy the last bent-knees appeal before delegating his side-kick to perform the actual execution.

All gangland turns out for the big funeral. The biggest wreath is the murderer's. This is but one occasion when the Public Enemy has a chance to dress up — we always see the obsequious tailor measuring for the first suit, promising the finished article by 5 p.m. the same day after the first protests and the thick tip — though Rico (Edward G. Robinson's Little Caesar) is sufficiently coarse not to appreciate the genteel progress of the funeral and fidgets in his car. Similarly the insistent hospital visitors of *Scarface,* after hastening the demise of a crook near death from earlier attempts, at least stop and fling their bouquets of flowers on top of him as they leave.

The world of refinement (from the first suspiciously smelt cigar) is eminently desirable. When Paul Muni buys the front row for the theatre, he becomes absorbed at a very elementary level by Miss Sadie Thompson's problem of husband in *Rain* and — forced to leave on urgent business — delegates his "secretary" to remain and watch. Scarcely has Rico been to Big Boy's aristocratic mansion than he is aping the gestures of high society for his gang to admire.

Once the chain of speakeasies has been built up (rival gangs visit them, coerce them to change allegiance, and assume their future needs to be double the present supply), it only

remains for a few lively gangwars to keep numbers down. A mock St. Valentine's Day massacre goes a long way, as in *Scarface* it reduces the absent gangboss Boris Karloff to jelly. Vivid montages are found, an atmosphere of nightmarish terror often conveyed as, in *Scarface*, a corpse slung from a car slides across the street, innocent children are killed in street battles, and distant screaming is heard in the night.


KEY
CAPONE SYNDICATE
ANTI-CAPONE
LOCATIONS OF GANG HANGOUTS
HEAVY LINES INDICATE APPROXIMATE BOUNDARIES OF TERRITORIES CONTROLLED BY VARIOUS GANGS.
NOTE: THE BOUNDARIES CHANGED CONSTANTLY and MOST TERRITORY WAS CLAIMED BY OPPOSING FACTIONS.
BURNHAM

IN OLD CHICAGO.
From **"The Dry and Lawless Years"** by John H. Lyle (Prentice-Hall International, London, 18/–)

The police are very much sideline figures. They track down the liquor factories, smash the barrels or impound the alcohol. Yet, in *Public Enemy*, the bondage store is entered and a pipeline run out to a gasoline truck in the street below. As soon as the cops haul in a gangster, they are subjected to insolence until the shyster lawyer arrives with his writ of habeas corpus. The police chief of *Scarface* (in one of several ludicrous "message" sequences forced into the film by public protest) lectures Muni on his inevitable downfall picturing a squalid end in the gutter (and when the camera in *Public Enemy* descends to ground level with Cagney wounded there, it becomes oddly powerful) as a sad contrast to the glory of a proud death at high noon in the Old West! This crisp speech is delivered in a racily unemotional voice laced with a periodic "Get me?" and much pencil waving. It has its own appeal (like the catechistic exchanges performed as a ritual after the plan has been explained, *i.e.* the gang-boss's "Right?", the minions' chorus of "Right!", and the boss's conclusive touch, "Right"); and if the police chief's prognosis hardly casts the deglamourising light intended on the exploits of later scenes, probably nothing could. For the director, Howard Hawks, aided by a sophisticated script (Ben Hecht, W. R. Burnett, and others) has given *Scarface* a tremendous drive. It retains authority where the other two films don't (*Public Enemy* seems a parody; *Little Caesar* is of intermittent interest) by superb acting and wholehearted technique. A whistling shadow commits the opening murder. of a ward boss relaxing after the traditional banquet; the fire of an automatic blasts dates off a calendar to indicate passage of time; a corpse in the street is photographed by a high shot past an undertaker's sign; a flashing sign "The World is Yours. Cook's Tours" haunts Scarface. And the acting is superb, from the primeval brute of the title (all the more terrifying when he first tries a submachine gun and a crazed glint in the eye indicates his sense of new power) through the oily Osgood Perkins to the sister, indignant at the bullying her brother gives her whenever she tries to have a good time (we assume a desire to inculcate a sense of propriety beyond his own reach).

Even the comic relief is good: there is the dumb stooge of a secretary who can't even pronounce his position, hangs up in confusion at each telephone call, and can't even write (as he recalls after searching all over for a pencil). He is as good as Stan Laurel. His most valiant efforts are made as a cafe is being shot up by a rival gang, the noise spoiling his efforts to take the telephone message.

While the police aren't made corrupt, they remain hard-boiled, taunting the criminals, biding their time. They never take their hats off indoors. While their persistence meets with ultimate success, the seed of downfall is in the gangster himself. Cagney elevates himself to such a height that he is rubbed out by a rival gang and, in a rare moment of moral contact with the spectator, is delivered like the meat, a trussed-up corpse that falls in when his mother answers the door. Otherwise *Public*

Enemy's good intentions are made ludicrous by such plot devices as Paddy Ryan's promise to reform and quit the racket just to save Cagney.

Rico, the Little Caesar, is trapped by his narcissism and pride. He has to shoot his erstwhile ally, now reformed by love... and, as the big close-up shows, he can't do it. His reputation ruined, his fortune spent hiding out, he is finally trapped when a superbly droll and sarcastic detective who has plagued the Little Caesar with taunts throughout his career keeps mocking him as a has-been in the newspapers. When Rico rings up from the flophouse to refute these "lies" he is quickly located and expires with the last-breath line of disbelief: "Is this the end of Rico?" On this portentous and poetic note, *Little Caesar* commends itself as vintage entertainment but hardly as a chunk of social realism.

Scarface's end is even better — or worse. The weak spot that surfaces from his armour of brutality is his sister. As he prepares to fight it out with the law from his steel-lined room, she turns up with the idea of killing him in revenge for his murder of the happy-go-lucky coin-spinning Guino (George Raft) just because she had been living with him. But the moment comes, and face to face these two creatures recognise an incestuous attachment. The mood is one of the Gothic horror, kindred souls in torment and exaltation. Then, when she is mortally wounded by police fire, Scarface goes beserk at the idea of losing her, of being left alone, and she unsympathetically contrasts his cowardice with the courage of Guino... and expires with, "Guino wasn't afraid..." A gas bomb or two through the window, and the film resumes its old track. A broken Scarface is greeted by jeering detectives. Yet a kind of mad courage is re-established when he breaks loose and is shot down with studied efficiency.

IN *AL CAPONE*, the customary elements are there but handled to more effect than the mere and dubious delight of the familiar. Superficially, I would agree, *Al Capone* "has for anyone who remembers the great gangster cycle of the thirties the effect of a series of cold, flat, murderous episodes without life and without tension," as one critic wrote, insensible to what has been intentionally substituted.

Capone, too, has a cultured front (*Rigoletto* is his favourite opera) and Big Jim Colosimo, the ward boss, delighted to find such discernment, proudly displays to him his autographed portrait of Caruso. The basic contradictions of culture and crime, long exploited for ironical contrast in separate scenes, are brilliantly fused with a striking effect of horror at the eventual murder of Big Jim. Al arrives one evening as

Big Jim is playing a record of Caruso. Arm in arm the pair of them cavort around the room, their voices taking up the aria of "M'Appari" until with his arms out-raised at the climactic moment of music, Big Jim is shot in the back by some thugs at the door. The music uncannily echoes the ensuing collapse of an unbelieving Big Jim against Al and the assassins' rush to freedom in which a bar tender is shot down. Later the music is to echo Capone's vile laughter at the success of his St. Valentine's Day massacre, arranged to show "love".

Another example of such stark antithesis is the murder of O'Banion, a North Side leader, in the baroque setting of the flower shop he loves to run as a sideline. Naturally, gangland patronises him for their supply of wreaths and it is gripped in a firm handshake with the leader of some visiting mobsters that his body is punctuated by their bullets. Later, when the slimy, cocksure reporter Matt Keely (superbly acted by Martin Balsam) has confessed his duplicity to Capone, he shrugs off Capone's threats by reference to his position as a man of the press. He is later seen entering the subway, the entrance festively decorated for Christmas. As the camera tracks with him through the white-tiled passage, the tuba music supplied by David Raksin emphasises the hearty joviality of the season. When two men knock down a Father Christmas and help him to his feet, Keely grins: and it is his last typical comment on life, for the two men force him to a seat and he is shot as a train (shown only by a flickering shadow effect) blots out the noise of gunfire. Keely, left on the seat, slowly crumples up; a woman screams; the music repeats its theme, only this time it is soured and tinged with hysteria. The clean emptiness of the set,

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Photo: The murder of Big Jim
(Rod Steiger & Joe de Santis)

the shining white tiles, and the splattered design on the light floor increase the horror with their various connotations of a clinical atmosphere (the morgue), cold purity in the white (and white Christmas), and bloodstained ground. The pervasive white in Capone's Florida mansion has a suffocating effect mocking him. There is one scene of a surreal flavour — empty, rain-soaked streets, the hot-dog man — where perhaps the stylisation of death becomes too florid to verge on sadism as Hymie the Pole (who kills weekdays only, Sunday being for church) buys one, takes a bite, and is shot by the hotdog seller who then leaps into a car. The why of this elaborate approach, unless it be that Hymie is said to have a predilection for such food and bound to buy, is unclear.

The above scenes are, however, contained by the overall style. There is particularly a sense of economy about the editing and photography. The scene in which Johnny Torrio and Capone control the voting in Cicero is prefaced by a roadsign which reads "CICERO, All Traffic Laws Enforced" — with the obvious implication in the subsequent shot of coercion at a polling station that traffic laws are about all that gets police attention. At Big Jim's funeral, the concluding shot is through the back door of the hearse; we see from inside the pall-bearers sliding the coffin in so that the light is blotted out just as the commentator speaks of the death of Chicago in this first eruption of gangwar. Even after this highly effective marriage of sound to visual, the ironic comment continues with the camera pulling off a picture of Big Jim behind his old desk to a quick discussion of the merits of the funeral before he becomes a forgotten picture on a wall as the more important topic, the new division of territory, is taken up.

The film puts Al Capone in a national perspective as well as detailing his environment. After the film's first saloon shots, the camera picks up Al arriving at the second floor, seen through a group of card players moving across the back of the set. Composition in depth as well as within the frame are hallmarks of the photography (directed by Lucien Ballard). The polling station, or the shop to which Al runs to phone a warning of a raid, are typically photographed from one angle without needless movement or extra shots. The persistent deep focus shows up sets well deserving the attention; there is never the feeling that the producers ordered this approach to save building more expansive sets.

Instead the characters are seen with a rigorous objectivity against the settings; there is in fact only one lapse (the gunning down of Johnny Torrio in his front porch, photographed from inside a car, with shots cut-in of Torrio facing camera shielding his face, so that the viewpoint this once is less neutral) which serves to emphasise the tight, consistent conception of the rest. Unnecessary details are excluded to such an extent that when Keely buys the subway ticket and the camera faces not him but the clerk, one expects the latter to have some special part to play.

Many arty devices of linking scenes have been developed, but I can't think of a more imaginative but yet not overly obtrusive example than this: A tradesman, browbeaten into handing over half his property to Capone for "protection", reacts to Capone's suggestion that he is playing smart: "I'm just willing to pay the price for peace." *Cut*, to the words "Peace on Earth" on a star of a Christmas tree, pan down to find that it is Capone's and Keely's in their spacious office in the business district. The sense of hypocrisy is reinforced when Capone smashes it with rage on leaving. This detail and others are blown up out of proportion by being set in lines of print here, but are worth discussing when "big" pictures like *Judgment at Nuremburg* have so little idea of cinematic style and hideously overemphasise their technique; and many other films don't have it at all.

Al Capone is compulsively viewable almost every frame of the way. The subtleties of lighting which separate all detail in layers are part of this look of authenticity. But Wilson also has a gift for faces and appearance, in absolutely the opposite sense from the austere Bresson. Actions, emotions are presented at full flood. To isolate a couple of examples: the two wives, of Johnny Torrio, unloading shopping from the car, and of the policeman, at their anniversary, look solidly right. And the delicate "business" of Keely, accepting a rebuke from Capone with a grinning "Touché!" and jabbing a finger into his back; or his slow rise as the commentary of a vital horse race is putting him in agonies of trepidation and excitement.

This film adds to the quiet pleasure of its rare assimilation of style with content by some of the acting. The narrative naturally gives most emphasis to Capone, played with all stops out by Rod Steiger. He hams up the earlier scenes by overplaying the obsequiousness; considering the exceptionally fine gradations of Steiger's work in *The Mark*, over-direction seems the likely cause. But for the most of the role, he does superbly well, though it is a reality of gesture and manner rather than character, owing to script limitations. The weak link of the film dramatically is the Fay Spain role. She is the widow of a man Capone murdered; he desires her because he can't buy her respect

with blood money. He "proves" his claimed innocence in her husband's murder; she relents, and in her first big role Fay Spain shows enormous talent at the delicate moment of accepting him with the words "You don't bother me." She probably marries him, and later when in a fit of fury he confesses to shut up her renewed suspicions, her feeling of a horrible uncleanliness is brilliantly done. Momentarily one becomes involved with this impossible romance.

The final downfall of Capone, greatest enterpreneur of the Depression, a much-loved vindication of rags-to-riches (witness the autograph hunter, the socialites at his swimming pool), is treated very quietly so that his career rather than having a sudden violent snuffing out assumes an inevitable parabolic shape... the steady rise to power, and the quick but not abrupt fall when suddenly taken to a court scene we share Capone's confidence that he is in for a light sentence. A final sequence of him devoid of power being beaten up by fellow convicts in Alcatraz assumes the nature of an epilogue rather than an anticlimax (although it is weakened by a curiously bad set). Capone, carried off bleeding, has — we learn — an incurable disease. (Its name, syphilis, is withheld.)

So many gangster films, although entertaining, leave nothing. *Al Capone*'s script sets it no higher in aim. But the emphasis—with a macabre poetry — *not* on Capone *nor* on brutality (St. Valentine's Day is very quietly done) but on the environment of corruption and death — with a fresh sense of judgement imposed by style — makes *Al Capone* worthy to stand with the originals. They had a punch; *Al Capone* is savoured judgement — *if* you take in the style. Its approach limits its sense of vision and deep moral purpose. Here style is more or less decoration. Such scripts are written and made to make money. But Bunuel's marvellous treatment of his material in *Republic of Sin* is another reminder of what can be done (in a different way) to revitalise a hackneyed theme.

Indeed, Wilson and his associates, Lucien Ballard and David Raksin, allowed to make a picture on crime from the side of the law, made of *Pay or Die* (1960) a film of clear moral purpose with a real sense of period (the Mafia activities, circa 1900) and of people. But *Pay or Die* tasted none of the success of *Al Capone*, for the public know what they want before they see it — and it isn't sagas of warm-hearted policemen.

One can, of course, identify with anything on screen, including the murders of *Al Capone*. But when the hooligans laugh at Capone kicking someone, or whatever else, for once they only reflect on themselves, not on the film.

NICHOLAS RAY

ADDING UP THE DETAILS

"King of Kings" could have been so much more. The whole is much less than the sum of the parts. However it is one of the few big films that is just as interesting on a second viewing. And it makes a fascinating study for anyone concerned with the old struggle between Hollywood and the creative artist.

Writes CHARLES BARR

THE WHOLE is much less than the sum of its parts. I must confess to being a bit hazy about what this means in the context of *King Of Kings* or indeed of any film. The concept is one very frequently used and seems to relate to a classical view of the artist as someone who gives significant form to a number of details which in themselves have little or no significance. The mosaic is produced by arranging coloured tesserae. If there is no pattern the whole is meaningless. The film, on this analogy, is put together from a jumble of long-shots, medium-shots and close-ups, and the effect of the whole depends on the inter-relationship of the parts. There is also the film that has a succession of good scenes which don't add up to anything.

One is tempted to wish that all films were like *Oliver Twist*. Lean's adaptation is a beautiful, craftsmanlike job. Scenes are built up economically and smoothly, the narrative is nicely paced and leads up to a satisfactory climax. The construction is faultless. The whole is more than the sum of its parts. To ask whether one wants to see the film a second time, or whether it approaches the power of the novel, is irrelevant. It is a well-made film.

The critic's task becomes increasingly complex as directors take more and more advantage of the flexibility of the medium. I don't want to draw a strict line between ancient and modern cinema. *Vixere fortes ante Antonioni.* But the director today can achieve unprecedented density of expression when he has at his disposal sound, colour, wide screen and almost perfect definition. Also — partly as a result of this — the old obsession with continuity, with meticulous construction, has disappeared. Directors feel free to reproduce the disconnected, spontaneous pattern of life or of thought and to leave the spectator to work out a synthesis for himself. Resnais has said that he would like people to look at *L'Année Dernière* as they look at a sculpture: lingering, interpreting, looking from different angles. Other films of a superficially very different style require the same imaginative participation from the audience. Not least, Nicholas Ray's.

There is a scene in Ray's *The James Brothers* where Jesse and his wife Zee, newly married, are shown the house they will live in. At this stage Jesse is torn between leading his gang and retiring, incognito, to family life and security. The couple sit in the window, imagining the years of happiness they will have: it is a game of make-believe like the deserted-house idyll in *Rebel without a Cause*. Then they walk back

Centre photo: **The James Brothers**

Left: **Nicholas Ray** (and on page 25)

across the room (filled with over-ornate, respectable furniture, mellow-toned), to the stairs, talking of how they'll spend Christmas with the children . . . and then go up to bed . . . As Zee starts to go on up the stairs Jesse catches hold of her urgently: "I have to go now"; she looks back and meets his face. This last shot starts as a smooth track across the room, begins to follow Zee upstairs, then jerks back slightly to hold Jesse standing by the door. It is one of those shots that have the precision and density of a painting extended in time as well as space. Jesse and Zee are definitively cut off from the prospect of carefree home life symbolised by 'upstairs'.

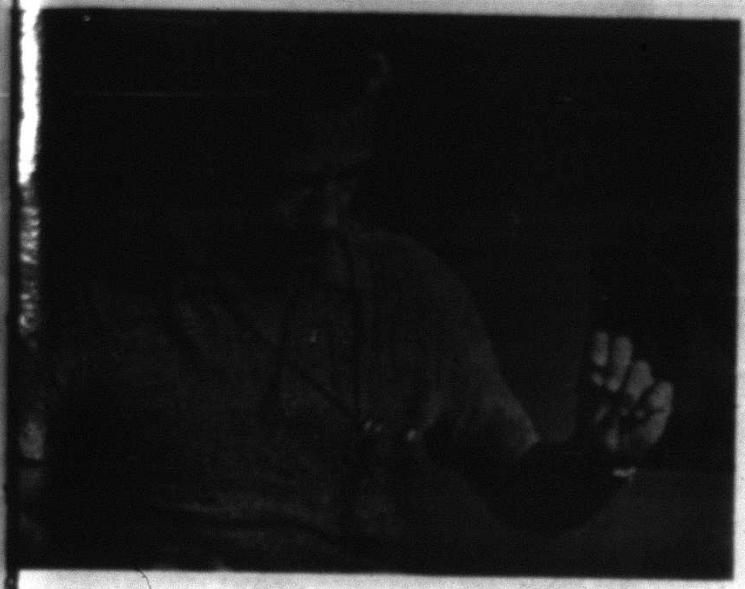
At the end Jesse returns home, having escaped from the law, and determines to settle down with his family. He is about to be betrayed. He goes into the garden with his two children (a beautiful scene, all in green and white). They come inside and the children are sent upstairs; a slight track follows them as they go up. Jesse turns away from them and moves across the room, leaving the frame bottom left, the camera still on the children. At this moment we know that Jesse will be killed.

Unfortunately we can't isolate scenes from a film and hang them up on the wall. The problem is how much weight can be attached to visual poetry of this kind in the context of a narrative film which is going to be judged after one viewing. It is a very thin line that separates poetry from technical cleverness (Ray from Kazan). Poetry is very rare in the cinema because nine times out of ten a director is simply filming narrative and does not have any particularly personal feeling about his characters, or if he does he lacks the skill to express his vision satisfactorily. His characters do not have the extra dimension that Ray's do. Jesse has points in common with other Ray heroes and Zee's place in his life is familiar from other Ray films. In his portrayal of them Ray is not only advancing the plot, he is expressing his own ideas about idealism, security, love . . . this is simply to say that his characters (without ever becoming Carné-type symbols) transcend the particular, as all memorable characters in drama or literature must do.

There are undertones of deep disillusion and nostalgia about the Jesse-Zee relationship. For Ray, happiness can be found in love, but only impermanently, or at great cost (e.g. the death of another). The clearest illustration I can give of this tone is from the script of *Bitter Victory*. Ruth Roman once loved Richard Burton, but is married to Curd Jurgens. Both men are setting off on a dangerous mission in the desert. She asks Burton what to say to her husband — "Tell him what women always say to their husbands when they go to war. Tell him he's a hero. Tell him he's a brave man. Tell him you'll be waiting for him when he comes back. Tell him he'll be making history." The same bitter nostalgia is sustained throughout the action and its force lifts the relationships right out of the triangular-love-interest convention. The characters are seen *sub specie æternitatis*. Richard Burton carrying a dying soldier across the baking sand is, on another level, a symbol of man's suffering. Although the intention of thus transcending the particular is nothing new it is seldom so beautifully achieved in the cinema because it needs such exact control, otherwise it will seem either feeble or pretentious. There are no short cuts to Significance. Because of the cinema's bias towards realism a character will always, first of all, have a *particular* existence: he cannot be used to illustrate truths about the human situations unless he is not merely presented but realised, cinematically; given solid expression.

Ray was not interested in the True Story of Jesse James (the film's American title) and he had to fight against the script's prosaic conception of Jesse, Frank and Zee. His genius lies in his ability to present characters and events in the way he wants to, by his control over the texture of film. His direction of Robert Wagner (Jesse) and Jeffrey Hunter (Frank) is as meticulous as a portraitist's portrayal of his subject, expressing visually, in bearing or in background, the essence of a character. Compare the two men as they ride into Northfield to rob the bank, at the head of their column. Their bearing betrays their respective temperaments. It is the way they handle the reins, the way they jog in the saddle, the look in their eyes, the set of their mouths. Almost every shot reinforces our knowledge of the characters. This is something that goes far beyond actors' performances. It is also bound up with colour, movement, lighting, grouping, angles — with what the editor of MOTION has termed "the whole mysterious business of mise-en-scène".

Similarly with the theme of inevitability. The idealistic purpose of the reprisals led by Jesse is bound to be distorted. Jesse will not be able to renounce violence. The final bank raid is bound to fail. Jesse will be betrayed; his vision of happiness with Zee cannot be more than an illusion. Normally thoughts like these are conveyed by dialogue and by the structure of the script. Here Ray reinforces the script by showing us, by the manner in which he shoots certain scenes, how inevitable the outcome is, and it doesn't so much matter that the structure has been changed by Fox and some of the material put into flashback, with particularly hideous



pink cloud effects. You still get the accumulation of details: the way Robbie, the eventual betrayer, looks and moves, and materialises at the edge of certain shots; the hypnotic way we are shown, almost in slow motion, Jesse's revenge killing of a farmer, which destroys his last chance of an amnesty; and in fatalistic scenes like the ones in Jesse's home that I have described.

I think that in *The James Brothers* these details do 'add up' — the whole is more than the sum of the parts — because there is unity of style and unity of inspiration. We can read the whole story in what Ray shows us. We can trace the pattern of events however rough the arrangement of them. Of course it would be marvellous to see *The James Brothers* and *Bitter Victory* and *Wind Across the Everglades* in the form Ray intended. *Bitter Victory* has an entire epilogue of seven minutes missing, which undoubtedly weakens it, and at times *Everglades* looks like a rough-cut, but Ray's films, like Stroheim's, are weakened comparatively little, because of this control over texture.

So there was no reason to assume, a priori, that *King of Kings* would be a mess. Ray has occasionally achieved a perfectly controlled scene like the temptation of Christ by Herod, or the death of Herod's father. He has worked desperately hard with colour, placing characters against significant backgrounds: Judas against brown, Pontius repeatedly against deep red and gold. Black and a darker red predominate in the procession to Calvary, green and white in the Resurrection. All this is done with a keen sense of the associative powers of colour and it helps give an intermittent life to the characters. But there is too much that is uncontrolled or irrelevant. The battles are well organised, but early on, when the screen is filled alternately with slingers and then with Roman shields repelling them, one begins to ask just what relevance this has. There is a long and distracting fight between Lucius and Barabbas. It is all very silly. And the director's touches I mentioned cannot add up to anything really meaningful unless there is unity of inspiration. Belief here is too easily suspended. And as a result of this unevenness Ray fails to achieve the insight which literature can only describe but which the cinema could suggest directly: "she saw the crucifix upon the wall ... she looked at it and as she looked she saw it for the first time in her life as a man hanging most painfully from his hands. How strange, she thought, that I never saw it in this way before" (from *Flight from the Enchanter* by Iris Murdoch).

The good scenes of *King of Kings*, then, are less effective than the ones described from *The James Brothers*, for they are isolated compositions instead of an *expression* of the forces running through the film. The whole is less than the sum of the parts.

The beautiful close-up in *Everglades* of Christopher Plummer (the idealistic bird-warden risking his life in defying poachers) against a shimmering blue-green background is a poetic expression of a character and a way of life that have been implicit in almost every image, and is therefore much more telling than any single shot in *King of Kings*.

All the same I prefer *King of Kings* to *El Cid*, though the latter's faults are less obvious. Anthony Mann seems not to have been frustrated, Rozsa's music is comparatively innocuous, there are a lot of virtuoso sequences, and no absurdities. Mann repeatedly uses the familiar device whereby a director can get his own point of view into a big production, viz. the association of things in the same shot. He tracks along behind Frank Thring, the leader of the decadent side, to the window of his palace, and shows, over his shoulder, the restless crowd below. When Thring is killed he has him thrown from the walls (long-shot) then moves the camera to focus on a goblet (foreground), a symbol of his decadence. Weapons are always materialising in close-up, linked dramatically with the unsuspecting enemy, who are passing by in the background. But these devices seem to me, in the context, perfunctory. The famous duel between El Cid and the rival champion is brilliantly done; I defy anyone not to be stirred by the climax — but how memorable does it seem five minutes later? El Cid riding out after three hours from history into legend left me cold, like

the chariot race in *Ben-Hur*. As Peter John Dyer says, "one neither cheers nor jeers".

I cannot feel that Mann was excited by El Cid, or moved by the love between him and Chimene; it doesn't seem that the story means much to him except as a technical challenge, however similar on paper El Cid may be to the classic Mann hero. I never sense the grip or the passion that I do in *Duel in the Sun* or at times in *Spartacus* and *King of Kings*.

Mann and Ray are, it seems, going to continue working with Bronston in Spain. Yordan will continue writing for him. One has a terrible vision of the cream of the industry being set to work in the Bronston Creative Artists Department, a clean, well-lighted place, with limitless facilities, complete security, a sensible editing team, a score by Dr Miklos Rozsa for every film, Oscars for everyone guaranteed... And scenes like the following being enacted: "At the studio, shooting began with an intimate scene between El Cid and Chimene played in the presence of 38 international press representatives. They hailed the teaming of Charlton Heston and Sophia Loren." A perfect case-history for Professor Parkinson.

When Nicholas Ray was in London recently he said he had left Hollywood because he felt the need to travel, to change his home and his place of work; otherwise the creative springs would dry up. Perhaps *King of Kings* was a special case, with its inevitable pressures and vested interests. Perhaps, in his projected films on the Boxer Revolution, the French Revolution, and the circus ("the biggest yet"), Ray will fight to impose his own vision as successfully as he did in *The James Brothers*. But at present Madrid doesn't seem the best place for keeping the inspiration fresh.

We understand that THE JAMES BROTHERS will be showing March 4th (4 days) at Classic Stockwell; April 1st (5 days) at Vogue Tooting; April 30th (6 days) at Classic Swindon; and June 3rd (7 days) at Classic Southampton. It has made a few appearances recently on the Granada circuit; there may be more.

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MONOGRAPH

THE FRENCH NEW WAVE

By Raymond Durgnat

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LOLA

THE FRENCH DIRECTORS are widely regarded as well away on the destruction kick. Realistic past the extremes of neuroticism, they see nothing valuable or permanent in the civilisation of today. The only method of discovering oneself would seem via the bedroom, but even here the truth is elusive. Human relationships turn out finally to be the least reliable clues to the puzzle of existence. In Rozier's *Blue Jeans in the Sun* the boy's unsuccessful attempt to seduce his pickup ends with the suggestion that in the age of the atom bomb it is best to make the most of one's time. She doesn't dig this one at all, and his rueful comment as she turns her back is "So much for sincerity". The shadow of total destruction has indeed the salvationary qualities of a religion about it. It represents an enveloping answer to insecurity and indecision. The new way of life or death that an atomic war would bring has an appealing simplicity. As well as trying all the fun of struggling for food and drink, the survivors would aim idealistically at the reconstruction of society; probably they would bungle it as effectively as the rejectors of Wren's London plan in 1666, but at least they would be too preoccupied with it to worry unduly about emotional instability. Psychology would be usurped from its present position behind the wheel and flung into society's back seat. A blessing. Whatever became of that old-fashioned notion that people worked off all their indecisions and inadequacies during ninety minutes of film and lived happily ever after? It got killed off by radiation.

That an atomic inferno would be secretly

Anouk Aimee
&
Marc Michel
in "Lola"

shrugs off that shadow

BY PHILIP STRICK

welcomed way back inside many a hen-pecked heart is shown by the irresistible world-wide appeal of the Western. The ideal Western hero doesn't get married. He doesn't even worry about this very much, either. Like John Wayne in (where do we start?) *The Searchers*, he watches the couples vanish through the gloomy portals of domestic bliss and then turns to wander alone into the sunlight of bachelorhood. Examples are legion, from Shane to the punctured romance of Burt Lancaster's Wyatt Earp, and on TV the celibacy is really alarming, almost to the point of perversion (*Laramie* is a particularly sick ménage). Granted, there exist firmly married heroes on the screen, Gary Cooper in *High Noon* and Van Heflin in *3.10 to Yuma* for example, but the point about their exploits is that they are made against all odds, and that includes the feminine ones.

The advantage of the gunfight is that for the dimwitted male it is so much easier to understand than women. George Hamilton get nowhere with Luana Patten in *Thunder of Drums*, but with the guidance of father-figure Richard Boone he proves real promising at killing Indians, and this is genuinely presented as a consolation. Nicholas Ray puts the peculiar dimensions of feminine ambition into a simplified form in his superb *Johnny Guitar*, in which the varied frustrations of McCambridge and Crawford are translated into recognisable terms of colour and action. Although he has seized with infectious delight upon the traditional details of the Western, he is really investigating a plainclothes piece of basic psychology. The final duel is every woman's dream of the absolute settlement of the eternal triangle. Bullets beat the bedroom every time, mainly because bullets represent an irrevocable decision. You shoot someone, and that's one problem solved. You go to bed with someone, and you've got to get up the next morning.

The Western is consequently wow in France. The idea of proving yourself by being quick on the draw is as sympathetic to the Gallic temperament as the *crime passionel*. It is, after all, a very conclusive method, which is why Yul Brynner got so annoyed when Steve McQueen got in more shots than he did during rehearsals for *The Magnificent Seven*. And it seems, after all, the *only* conclusive method, which is why fist-fights aren't as popular as they were in the *On the Waterfront* days. Lee Cobb yelling threats while battered Brando leads the longshoremen into work is not really a decisive enough scene to be full dramatic satisfaction for the murder of Rod Steiger. The showdown has come not in the form of a duel but in Brando's long stagger to the warehouse; his victory is punishingly realistic but it leaves an irritating loose end. Now where the French have scored during their film explosion of the past few years is in their search for a different sort of balm to all such irritating loose ends of reality —

and Truffaut, Godard, and Chabrol have exposed the nerves of their generation by being brutally realistic. The escapism of the Western has vastly appealed to them, as back numbers of "Cahiers" show, but the method they have used to dodge the implicit despair of their own creed is not to use the simplification of gunplay but to escape backwards, into nostalgia, and outwards, into alienation. The assertion of the personality that is the expressed concern of their characters has been made in fact by the creation of the films themselves. For the new directors are confident of one thing, at least. The lasting value of film, as a document, as a work of art, as a piece of secular technique, as a mirror, as an attack, as a comment, as a diversion, but primarily as a form of self-expression.

With this conviction established, it is possible to get somewhere. The bomb still casts its shadow, the emotions are still heartbreakingly transitory, but the escapism is neither violent nor sentimental. The successors to the mercilessly anarchic *A Bout de Souffle* (*Breathless*) or *L'Eau a la Bouche* (*The Game of Love*) have all the consciousness of necessary cynicism, but from the shambles they draw a film vocabulary that is escapist in itself. Rivette's *Paris Nous Appartient*, immensely interesting because it covers two years of intellectual development in the French cinema, shudders with warnings of imminent destruction appropriate to the ethos that produced the film, and yet manages to concern itself with too many layers of allusion and philosophy to be solely destructive in purpose. Together with Astruc's *La Proie pour l'Ombre* (*Shadow of Adultery*), it shows the slowly growing vocabulary in its phonetic stage. And with Jacques Demy's *Lola*, I believe we have that vocabulary triumphantly in action. Not completed, for like any language in use it is always changing. But some of the atomic shadow has been dispelled, and the gloom that dulled the splendour of *Tirez sur le Pianiste* has been cleared, and *Lola* has achieved this not by being oblivious (which is why the delectable *Jeux de l'Amour* [*Playing at Love*], a retrospective comedy if ever there was one, doesn't qualify for this particular praise) but by acceptance, acknowledgement, and blatant dismissal. Hopeless we may be, but we may still hope. And Anouk Aimée waits seven years for her lover to return, and it probably wasn't worth it and probably won't be worth it, but back he comes all the same, oozing with wealth, and she is happy, and suddenly we can all be happy too, especially as we can pile our repressions on to the disconsolate figure of Marc Michel as he wanders off to make his own fortune. The returned lover, incidentally, wears a Stetson hat...

Alexandre Astruc is an exponent of this new vocabulary partly because his films toe their own stylish line and partly because he is unashamedly nostalgic. *Rideau Cramoisi* (*The Crimson Curtain*) and *Une Vie*, both significantly literary in origin, deal with the problem of communication of emotions as searchingly as do Antonioni's films but their settings are a hundred years earlier. This devotion to lush colours and costumes gives to the films a sophistication and beauty that is visually a little at variance with their stories. Astruc's manifest reverence for Renoir the painter tended to distract him from Maupassant, but the theme of his film of 1958 is substantially the same as that of *La Proie pour l'Ombre*. And when he portrays adultery in an ultra-modern setting, still with allegiances to Renoir but also with full appreciation of the better points of contemporary French directors, he is bang up to date in his subject and ahead of his subject in sophistication. Annie Girardot, Daniel Gelin, and Christian Marquand, all taking refuge behind impassivity to convey their inability to escape from themselves, make for an unsympathetic trio. Astruc makes them interesting by what he does with them, and he sets them in the aseptic modernity of glass-box flats, fast cars, recording studios and airports with so evident a dislike of the impersonality of contemporary existence that, like Jacques Tati, he seems to blame it for the pitifully rich inadequacy of his characters to know what they really want. The lack of communication between couples is emphasised by all the usual frame compositions, telephone calls, and car rides, but is particularly attributed to environment in such scenes as Girardot's visit to her husband on a building site, and in the final plethora of barriers to contact at the airport.

Contrary to what one would expect from *Une Vie*, Astruc portrays oldfashioned simplicity as the antidote to unhappiness. Christian Marquand lives on a farm, in abrupt contrast to the home of the woman he loves. The two are at their most lyrically happy when the classical music that baroquely accompanies the showdown in the recording studio (and note in this superbly ornate scene how Girardot's tirade only gets properly through to her husband when accidentally played back on the tape-recorder) overflows into the Goethe and apples rustic bliss of Marquand's orchard. Something of Lawrence here. Significantly the two contemplate their entwined selves in an ornately framed mirror which sets them back at least a century; they have escaped from the present, from the practical, from the realities of adultery. But like the reflection in the glass their contentment is intangible and transitory, and breakfast in the garden next morning is evoc-

ative, sentimental, but cold. Soon Girardot is streaking across the countryside in her white car, ditching Marquand at a symbolic railway crossing on the way. Clutching at a wire fence at the end of the film, she finds herself shut off from what she wants with, as usual, something she doesn't want. And she drives into the city she cannot escape.

The depression in *Proie pour l'Ombre* is undeniably atomic. Unable to escape from herself into decisive action, into imitations of the past or into appreciation of simplicity (which is what Marquand has partly managed to do) Girardot is stuck with the pointlessness of her existence and is virtually looking for something to do until the bomb drops. She tries everything and remains edgily unsatisfied. In that sense, she is identical with Jean Seberg in *A Bout de Souffle*, betraying everyone including herself in the effort to find a point to existence. Where Lola in Jacques Demy's film manages successfully to escape this dead end is in her own simplicity. She has, in fact, refused to reach it, while recognising that it exists. Her heart is not cluttered with the intellectualism that drives her predecessors into desperation. Like them, she waits; but she sticks to the life she has and makes little complaint. Now Demy has a similar nostalgia to that of Astruc, but it takes a more cinematic form — the result of a "Cahiers" upbringing. His film is again laced with classical music, this time Beethoven in preference to Bach, and again his theme is an old one given a modern treatment. But Demy deals in charm rather than richness, and his cynicism is directed against form rather than character.

Lola is full of references to the cinema, from obvious homage to Gary Cooper to the delicate burlesque of early Hitchcock with the smuggling chemist, his wall-map and his "I don't know you — you don't know me". It employs all the Coutard hand-held camera tricks, and uneven, almost careless photography, combined with delicately composed scenes (like the one in which the gulf between the girl Cecile and her mother is expressed by the girl's appearance at points all over the screen while her mother is talking), and contrived visual effects like the fair-ground slow motion. It allows the characters to play for sympathy while poking gentle fun at them in the *Tirez* manner, notably when the mother promptly faints traditionally at the return of her unpredictable son and when the cabaret girls weep in unison as Lola is reunited with her lover. Roland, the central link to the story, is something of the contemporary anarchist, an unemployable romantic dreamer drifting from one relationship to the next in a morose hunt for past and future; Demy doesn't require us to take *him* very seriously either, which is why *Lola* covers new ground. Directors have alienated us from their characters most efficiently recently, but they have expected us to make full use of what those characters stand for. Roland takes himself very seriously but he stands for such a hazy and contrived mixture of fatalism and Lola's lover in embryo that he neither alienates nor involves us. The intricate strands of the fable wind around him, and we are free to admire their pattern. *Lola* constructs a present magic out of spellbinders of the past, Westerns included, and converts fatalism to optimism by the simple process of being crazily cheerful. Lola is a link with the days when Joseph Cotten took Ginger Rogers back to prison amid strident "I'll be seeing You's", and far more of a model for the mad process of being alive in the atomic shadow than those woebegone misfits who have stared out from the screen at the conclusion of so many promiscuous tragedies. I'm not saying she is necessarily better, or any more or less realistic. She's just a darn sight easier to live with. She has the advantage of being discerningly new- and old-fashioned at the same time, and if you can't end the suspense by getting shot by a gunslinger, man, that's the way to be.

motion We Like (2)

GEORGE SINGLETON, whose gamble with good cinema in Glasgow has paid off handsomely. When he built the 830-seater Cosmo cinema in Rose Street to supplement his chain of larger suburban cinemas during 1939, cynics scoffed at his intentions of running specialist fare full time. But Glasgow has responded so well ever since that not only has the Cosmo become the mainstay of the circuit in this age of declining attendances, but it has also dared to venture with programmes of much less than certain appeal, subsidising them with the inevitable moneymakers like *Les Jeux de l'Amour*. Recently, for example, it became the first cinema in the country to publicly screen *Romeo, Juliet and Darkness*, and has given a rare commercial showing to Torre-Nilsson's *House of the Angel*. Another imaginative choice was the special revival of Irving Lerner's clever B-feature *Murder by Contract*. Cornerstone of success is the warmth of welcome, symbolised by the promotive figure of "Mr. Cosmo" doffing his bowler; and, of course, the unerring quality of the shows. In short, this elegant cinema is the key showplace of the good foreign film in Glasgow — and deserves to be.

ALDRICH & "Kiss Me Deadly"

THE APOTHEOSIS OF

KISS ME DEADLY is possibly Aldrich's one great film; he has said that he detests it. Yet, besides it, his more sincere, personal, films, like *Attack*, and *The Big Knife* appear strident, hysteric, slightly out of control. At heart, *Kiss Me Deadly* is equally hysteric, as we shall see. But its hysteria is one which Aldrich disliked, which he opposed. Out of the conflict came, providentially, an equilibrium, like two wrestlers evenly matched who acquire an apparent, but dynamic, immobility. Aldrich set out to make a purely formal film. He applied such rigour and cold intelligence to its basically atrocious story that the result was a 'frozen tragedy'. Formal yet Dionysiac, cerebral yet vulgar, it has the cold atrocity of a Greek tragic myth — lacking only the chorus, the voice of common sense, of received wisdom and earthy resignation, whose absence is itself symptomatic of the cultural chaos of the West in general and the asphalt jungles in particular, and confers upon *Kiss Me Deadly*, as upon *Psycho*, the bleak nihilism which is its terrible beauty.

THE STORY—approximately—is this. As hardly anybody follows the thread of film plots, I have broken this down into a series of episodes, of dramatic confrontations.

A girl runs, barefoot, down a highway at night. She is beautiful, clad only in a raincoat, scared. Her breathing is heavy (panicky gasps on the soundtrack.) She signals to a highpowered sportscar — driven by Mike Hammer, private eye, (Ralph Meeker). Her name is Christina (Cloris Leachman). Mike guesses she has escaped from a nearby asylum. Half-intrigued, half as an automatically antisocial gesture, he sneaks her past a police roadblock, pretending she is his wife. But they fall into the hands of those who are pursuing her: Hammer, knocked unconscious, comes to just in time to hear her last screams as, refusing to talk, she is tortured to death.

Mike narrowly escapes death, returns to his office and his loving, unloved secretary, Velda (Maxine Cooper). He is summoned before the Interstate Crime Commission who try to bully him into revealing what he knows. He refuses to speak. Christina has left him a clue: the words "Remember me." He looks up his pal, Nick (Nick Dennis), an Italian garagist with a passion for supercharged sports cars which go "Va-va-voom, va-va-voom." Mike finds a present outside his apartment: a brand new sports car. Once Mike has disconnected the sticks of dynamite attached to the ignition, Nick prepares to drive off. Mike stops him. "That's the one they meant us to find." He disconnects the second stick of dynamite and they drive away.

Nick tries to trace Christina. One of his leads is an unsuccessful Greek with operatic ambitions; he is too scared to talk, until Mike starts smashing his valuable collection of Caruso records, one by one. He finds Christina's flat. The walls are lined with books; the radio, forever tuned to one of those foreign stations, responds to a click of the switch with 'Fingal's Cave.' A friendly porter puts him on the track of Christina's flatmate, a girl called Lily Carver. Lily (Gaby Rodgers), a sad, wide-eyed blonde, is hiding out in a crummy boarding-house and greets him with a firmly levelled automatic. He half wins her confidence.

Some men whose faces we do not see — only the smart shoes of their leader — call on Nick and tamper with the car-hoist, crushing him to death under their sports car, which Mike had passed on to him. No more va-va-voom.

Mike is obsessed with tracking down Nick's murderers. Velda pleads with him, sneers at him. "So you're going after the mysterious They who'll even kill for the sake of the Great Whatsit!" But he solves the clue — a reference to a poem by Christina Rossetti — and visits the morgue, where Christina's body lies on its refrigerated tray. A corrupt medic (Percy Helton) tries to sell them the key he found on her; Mike beats it out of him. The key fits the locker of a snooty sports-club. The smarmy-voiced receptionist refuses to admit them — Mike pretends to bribe him but gives

VA-VA-VOOM

By RAYMOND DURGNAT

him a clout instead. The Great Whatsit is in the locker: a little box with stout leather straps, which is heavy as lead and hot as hell. It hisses and glares as its lid is lifted. Mike shuts it quick, but his wrist is already badly burned.

The police pick him up. Velda has been kidnapped. The mysterious They are foreign agents anxious to gain possession of the box, which is a vital atomic secret. Christina, a scientist, was being held in protective custody in the asylum. Contrite at having been responsible for her death, Nick's death and Velda's abduction, Mike hands over the key. But when the locker is opened, the box is gone, and the receptionist lies dead.

Forbidden by the F.B.I. even to attempt to rescue Velda, Mike returns to his office. He in turn is kidnapped, and taken to the agents' hide-out, a lonely house by the sea. He is given a truth-drug to make him reveal a secret he does not possess. At last he kills the doctor and his guards, and, looking for Velda, finds Lily Carver. The box is on the table before her. Covering Mike with the automatic she compels him to approach, promising that she will shoot him in the stomach as they kiss. But she shoots him before he has even touched her. He drops. The mastermind, a plump, pompous, slightly absurb man, warns her not to open the box. But she is Pandora, she must. She opens the lid wide — as the concentrated energy beats against her, she bursts into flames where she stands.

Mike, only wounded, staggers through the house, finds Velda, as the whole house blazes. He and Velda help each other down the beach, away from the house. There is an explosion, a small but ominous mushroom hangs over the sky. Velda and Mike stagger into the dark, rolling sea, and watch. The end.

THIS BANAL, artless and violent story is recounted by the scriptwriter (A. I. Bezzerides) and Aldrich in a formalistic style. The photography (Ernest Laszlo) has a cold, hard, steely quality, its strongest tones are black and a shiny, acidulous grey. Shadows never—as so often in thrillers—override the shapes of things, as if they were half-sunk into a turgid blackness: on the contrary, each object seems flat and isolated, obdurately itself, invested with a sinister stillness and deliberateness. Everything has the coldness of stainless steel: the faces are reduced to the same grey, metallic texture. The world is devoid of sensuousness, each person is the *idea* of a person, an impersonating android.

A Chirico light bathes quadrangular Mondrian planes. Staircases become tunnels, galleries. The film's spiritual ancestry is not far to seek. Where have we previously seen the quiet yet terse rectangularities of Mike Hammer's well-appointed apartment? — of course, in Fritz Lang's *Siegfried*, only there it was the flagstones of a medieval palace. And *Kiss Me Deadly* is the best crime fantasy since *The Testament of Dr. Mabuse*. The plot mechanics are less outrageous, the mood less realistic, more formal, chilly and archaic, but the characters seem even more dehumanised. They have the ominous quietness of schizophrenia. The dehumanisation, the fragmentation of human encounters, the defensive suspicions of social relationships, are summed up in the elaborate tape-recording attachment to Mike Hammer's telephone. Are his callers there now, their voices speaking from three hours ago? The clean sterility of the images prevails even in the scenes of violence: there is no blood, bruises are small and neat, clothes are sparingly torn or disarranged, what squalor there is is pictorially highly organized. Compositions—like Mike Hammer himself—

PHOTOS: **Left** — the menacing Lily Carver, played by Gaby Rodgers.

Above — further menace, with Mike Hammer, acted by Ralph Meeker, in the midst of it.

are bold, enigmatic, frigid. If objects are shiny surfaces, the composition makes bold use of depths, of implied volumes, of rooms as tense space within six unfriendly planes.

Similarly every sound exists in meticulous isolation. The film is an ominous silence punctuated by granite chips of words — or by the animal sound of terrified breathing. Christina pants as she runs from the asylum, the sound of her gasps is overlaid, oppressively, its erotic overtones don't pass unnoticed by the film's 'natural' audience, the teenagers in industrial halls. Their tone and quickened rhythm rise to a shrill climax in the extraordinary shot (censored in Great Britain) where Mike Hammer lies stunned in the foreground while, beyond, Christina's naked legs hang and kick frantically as she screams under whatever tortures the mysterious They are inflicting on her. (Here Aldrich strikes just the optimum point between suggested and showy eroticism and horror). The motif of mysterious, steady, threatening breathing issuing from nowhere, from everywhere, from just behind one — a favourite nightmare motif — is taken up again when the box is opened. It 'breathes' with a slow, deep, unhurried, masculine gloating, like an evil genie at last let out.

In this long silence, the music is eerily romantic: 'Fingal's Cave' reminds us of the scorpion episode in *L'Age d'Or*. It also has a quality of faint, forlorn, desperate anguish, contrasting with the metallic totalitarianism of the decor, and prefiguring the finale — 'on the beach' — with the dark ocean of safety, darkness and drowning, towards which the wounded lovers stagger from the crystallised aggression of twentieth century technology.

Each terse and cryptic line of dialogue acquires a sudden depth in this silence—as well as a witty inanity. The idiosyncrasies of idiom lead straight to a warped metaphysics. 'Who are you?' someone asks someone. The reply is terse and to the point. 'Who I am?—who are you!?' Egoism and paranoia could hardly find a more elemental caginess than this. *Kiss Me Deadly* touches on the mental confusions, the highly reasoned suspicions of Rivette's *Paris Nous Appartient*. Indeed, the detective story, with its murders, its confusions of guilt, innocence and identity, probably bears much the same relationship to the reasonableness and superficiality of our lonely crowds as romantic lyricism to the grandiose hysterias of the nineteenth century.

Mike Hammer looks up a boxer friend, Eddie (Juano Fernández) and tries to buy information from him. Eddie claims to have an unmatchable offer from the other side to keep silence. He smiles as Mike keeps raising the price, then beams: "You can't top this. They said they'd let me breathe". So much for free competition in an open market.

Personal relationship are crude yet morse-like. In *The Long Wait* (second of the trio of Spillane novels filmed by Victor Saville, of which *I the Jury* was the first and *Kiss Me Deadly* the third) the amnesiac (Anthony Quinn) staggers dazedly from one girl to another endeavouring to ascertain which is his wife, from which he hopes to deduce who he himself is—another form of the 'who am I—who are you' conundrum. *Kiss Me Deadly* is impregnated with the same vague, irrational mysteriousness that can come into play when several of the characters seem to have evasive but pervasive resemblances. Despite the nonsensuous visuals, we become vaguely aware that the girls all have rather rough complexions. Christina and Lily Carver are blondes, slim, have a vague gaze. Velda is dark: passionately in love with and forever frustrated by her employer: loyal, fierce, comradely, she is a frustrated mistress, even, maybe, wife and mother. But all the women are masculine in stare or attack, they have a forceful, exasperated clitoral sexuality. There is a specific and precise obscenity in Mike Hammer's sneer at Christina: "Other hitchhikers use their thumbs; you have to use your whole body". (Another knowing laugh from the lads in the front stalls). But Mike is never taken in. His resistance to feminine blandishment has, perhaps, the faintest of dying echoes of Philip Marlowe's tainted chivalry: but in his sexual relationship Mike Hammer is passive, sardonic and frigidly resistant, not to say a bit of a tease, to these disturbing androgynous remales. The sexual roles are reversed. Meanwhile, Velda, addicted to ballet excercises in Mike's office, sweats out her frustrations by strenously twirling and levering her sinewy body round poles and bars, rounding on Mike's placid, kindly but bloody minded indifference like a mother panther looking for its cubs.[1]

As in many traditional detective and boy's adventure stories, the hero has a sidekick, Nick, a pal, plump, good-natured, faithful, impulsive, not so tough or clever, slightly ridiculous, and older—a dreamlike reversal of reality, for the older man ('father') is patronised by the 'son'. And there is a little hierarchy of more or less obstructive, inept father-figures[2]: the opera singer, the porter, Mr. Mist of the art gallery, the receptionist at the club — leading up to the plump, pompous mastermind who, vainly, pleads with Lily Carver not to open the divine — and diabolical — box. But the devil is a woman: she turns on him the automatic of her destructive virility and unleashes the power of the atom.

[1] Something about her expression reminds us of Eva Dahlbeck, the 'female battleship' in Bergman's films.

[2] The film's total pattern is more complicated, for we also have to include two sets of younger, more formidable antagonists for Mike — the F.B.I., and a rich gangster. But to go into all this would obscure the main line of our argument.

The script is full of laboured anti-egghead detail. The culture-crammed flat is associated with the mental imbalance of Christina and Lily Carver; behind the arty weirdies loom the foreign spies. Christina is a scientist, intellectual and therefore unreliable. Classical music comes from those sinister foreign stations. The mysterious Mister Mist, director of an art gallery, hastily gulps down sleeping pills so as to escape Mike's grilling—the implications of cowardice, passivity, even death-wish and suicide, all allegedly characteristics of those masochistic intellectuals, aren't far away.

But, as often in American films, highbrowism is a particular form of snobbery. Perhaps, since to become rich is a legitimate American aspiration, your man-in-the-street, when he wants to express his envy; directs it at people who spend their cash on mystifying status symbols like modern paintings, classical music, and hundreds of books. But sheer social envy isn't hard to find—the little episode at the club, Mike's call on a rich gangster who sits sunning himself by his swimming pool with a beautiful blonde and two (inept) tough guys. Velda's ballet dancing is a slightly ridiculous but sympathetic highbrow trait (Women — and mothers — are more often associated with culture than men, in American films). And Mike Hammer would have been a much smarter detective if he had been cultured enough to understand the clue 'Remember me'.

Mike is also in an ambivalent relationship with the law. The F.B.I. try to bully him into telling them what he knows—understandably, he won't. But later when he finds the box is atomic, and that Velda has gone, he repents. As the F.B.I. man reprimands him he reacts with exactly the same gauche, adolescent gesture as Marlon Brando when reprimanded by the policeman in *The Wild One*—a sort of drawing back of the head, a vulnerable, soft gesture not too far from tears. The private eye is out of his depth in this brave new world of Communist agents and atomic fission. McCarthyism? the dawn of social conscience? Either way, bureaucracy takes over; where the secrets of the universe are in question, only the official 'They' can oppose the shadowy 'They'. If in the end Mike's heroic individualism is vindicated, it is by accident. Too powerful, too pedantic, over-estimating him, seeking the information he does not possess, the heavies take him straight to their hideout. Private enterprise becomes a passive martyrdom. The hero is spreadeagled on a bed, a hypodermic with a truth drug is plunged into him, and he babbles away, keeping secrets only because he doesn't know them. With a courageous opportunism he escapes, and he and Velda cower from the pillar of fire, caught between it and the black mysterious ocean night. It is the negro—traditionally the earthy, underprivileged citizen—who says, "You can't top this. They said they'd let me breathe". The profit motive has broken down there all right.

Part of the film's power comes from its crudity. It is crammed with symbols of contained violence. The sequence with the boxer is introduced by a close-up of fists battering a punchball. Cars, sticks of dynamite, the hypodermic filled with a truth-drug, are all forms of va-va-voom. One remembers that the car (social status, speed, virility) brings death to whoever accepts it. It conceals an acceleration of its own power—a double dose of dynamite. It crushes the acolyte of speed beneath it. And the box, the great whatsit, is the apotheosis of Nick's crazy longing, of the va-va-voom mentality which is the American dynamic. Power = money = death. The film's final shot is a classic image for the twentieth century: on the beach, between the devil and the deep black sea, the wounded couple, the primal unit, supporting each other, stagger away from the bomb. The atomic box is the product of technology, of science, of patriotism; it is 'bound' to bring disaster, as it brought it in *Them, Tarantula, X the Unknown* and *On the Beach*. Foreign agents? Mad scientist? Yes. But they're only the base mechanicals of fate, Caliban's other face in the glass. The apocalyptic whatsit is Pandora's atomic box, an ignis fatuus, the Holy, or unholy, Grail of the cult of power, the sacred ark to touch which, even by accident, is instant death.

The clue, 'Remember me' leads to the morgue. Mike stares down at Christina, lying stark and dead on the cold slab. "It must be hidden somewhere on her body". A long pause while the audience mulls over one or two interesting possibilities. "She must have swallowed it". The key in the corpse opens the casket of power and death in the locker. Pandora's box (female) is also the most tumultuous virility symbol, the atomic pillar of fire (male). The house (female) blazes, the woman burns as she stands upright (male). The women are men. (The name Lily Carver is particularly charming—lilies are white, feminine, virginity, and death, 'carver' implies butchery, or, to put a Freudian edge to it, castration). Christina died kicking her legs out under some inconceivable torture; a cataclysmic sexual explosion contrasts with the couple who—lovers at last? or still only good friends?—stagger to—a dubious safety.

It is the stark, abstract style of Bezzerides and Aldrich which spans the space dividing the 'mere' detective story from the pure, intense and violent imagery of the nightmare. A sexuality of terror and violence pervades the film (breathing, running, kicking out, exploding) while faces and bodies seem metallic, hammered, stilted and enigmatic in their fixed postures. The radio in Christina's flat, forever tuned to the foreign station, is paralleled by the complicated tape-recording apparatus attached to Mike Hammer's telephone, a strange

KISS ME DEADLY

absurd contrivance, expressing a labrynthine, mechanical presence-in-absence, a paranoid omniscience. The opposite of soft, eerie and treacherous culture is Mike Hammer's virginal loneliness.

Kiss Me Deadly is one of the Spillane novels so admired by Marty's fellow-dwellers in the asphalt jungle. And it's not surprising, for melodrama, however absurd, however monstrous, must find an emotional resonance in the very audience which your serious artist, like Chayefsky, describes. But this where we came in.

ROCCO *from page 10*

The construction of *Rocco* as a whole, the inter-relation of scene with scene, is beautifully weighted and controlled, better seen and appreciated, than described here. Thus Nadia's symbolic murder is seen in detached long-shot, to contrast with the sticky emotionalism of the cross-cut close-ups of the boxers; the ritualism of the sequence and the hot emotions which it represents, are thus both perfectly expressed. But above all, *Rocco* is a film about a special social situation, and everything else is related, in one way or another, to this central theme. Even the division of the film into five episodes, one for each brother, has a special social significance. For what might seem a mere superficial device at first (after all, the titles could be left out without disturbing the delicate structure of the film), gathers importance as the film progresses, for it provides a thread which culminates in Cirro and Lucca: Cirro with his social conscience who adapts himself to the city, and Lucca who represents the future.

It would, of course, be ridiculous to say that *Rocco* is a good film simply because it has a social conscience (although social comment has, indeed, often been conducive to good art). It is a good film because everything is perfectly integrated towards this theme, because it is stamped with its director's personal style. It is a style which above all concentrates on the "feel" of objects, their visual sensuousness, and upon the director's anxiety to understand his characters, which in part explain his fondness for the close-up. Visconti has the power to simultaneously move us and to make us think. In the final analysis *Rocco* has the depth, the intensity, and the balance, of a novel of Dostoievsky. It is odd that Visconti's only attempt at filming a Dostoievsky work — *White Nights* — should be so removed from reality.

CLAYTON'S PROGRESS

by Peter Cowie

Jack Clayton entered the film industry as long ago as 1935, and gradually became known as associate producer on such films as An Ideal Husband, Queen of Spades Beat the Devil, **and** I am a Camera. **His first directorial assignment was** The Bespoke Overcoat, **stemming from Chekhov via an engaging little play by Wolf Mankowitz, which was set in the East End. It was a short film, won prizes at Venice and Edinburgh, and actually went on release.**

Three years later came Room at the Top, **which provoked tremendous critical praise when it opened three years ago. It was adapted from John Braine's novel describing the ruthless rise and gradual disillusionment of Joe Lampton, who marries the daughter of a local industrial magnate but in doing so drives his mistress to suicide. Now, Clayton's third film,** The Innocents, **has enjoyed a highly successful West End run and yet has disappointed critics generally. Nevertheless, on the admittedly shallow evidence of these two recent films I would argue that Clayton is the best director working in Britain to-day.**

THERE ARE scarcely any thematic affinities between *Room at the Top* and *The Innocents*, except perhaps that each film traces the weakening and descent into self-pity of its central character. *The Innocents* (taken from Henry James's "The Turn of the Screw") is a decrepit, period tale set in Victorian England. Miss Giddens (Deborah Kerr) is appointed governess to two children, Flora and Miles, who live at Bly House, deep in its own parkland. There she becomes convinced that the children are possessed by the spirits of the previous valet and governess at Bly, who are supposedly dead. The ending is equivocal, showing the death of Miles and the complete moral and emotional collapse of Miss Giddens herself.

So much for the plot. As an inventive director, Clayton sometimes allows his imagination to distort what is obviously intended to be a rational — if not a wholly realistic — situation. In *Room*

Martin Stephens & Deborah Kerr in "The Innocents"

at the Top one recalls the scene at the Civic Ball where Joe stalks in with evening shirt and stiff collar awry, and is humbled by his own masochistic inferiority complex and by the disdain of the Brown party. It is too cut and dried, just sufficiently larger than life to make it acceptable but scarcely credible. One could contend that Braine is at fault here; but a cinematic version of a novel is either better or worse than the book, but certainly different. Clayton has showed this with *The Innocents*, where Miss Giddens seems to be a far more *involved* figure than her counterpart in "The Turn of the Screw", though of course this is Clayton's interpretation of the story and none can gainsay him.

But textual criticism like this is limited, and well clear of Clayton's real talent, which is *stylistic*. He says what he has to say with the camera, instead of with dialogue, with atmosphere rather than with action (the beating-up sequence and its aftermath at the end of *Room at the Top* is, one feels, a failure). One can readily speak of *The Innocents* in terms of other directors — Hitchcock, Torre-Nilsson, Welles, Bunuel, Reed — but as a whole the film is impressed with Clayton's style more clearly than is *Room at the Top*. From the start the treatment is fluid. One sees Miss Giddens' hands in close-up as she prays for "the children"; this dissolves into her face as she sits talking to The Uncle (Michael Redgrave) in his London office, before her experiences have begun. It transpires that this shot in the darkness refers to the end of the film, when Miles lies dead in the garden and Miss Giddens weeps and prays over his body. It serves to set the mood of the story far more effectively than James's own rather pedestrian prologue, with

the characters telling ghost stories to one another.

Once Miss Giddens reaches the country, the pace quickens. Cutting is restricted to a minimum to preserve concentration and to emphasise the swift sequence of events. One of Clayton's *penchants* is for following his characters into rooms with the camera, and in this film it is particularly appropriate, because it gives the spectator the feeling that he is sharing the agitation and bewilderment of the governess. An excellent touch is when Miss Giddens walks around the drawing room after she has drunk her tea, and suddenly sees herself in a large mirror. Out of context it is meaningless; but Clayton's presentation of the incident is very subtle. The camera veers across the mirror behind her and away again almost at once, so that the impression is unobtrusive but momentarily disturbing. Clayton gradually dictates the mood of subsequent scenes by the speed of his camera movements. While the governess is exploring the various rooms of the house, the tracks are slow and thus sinister and disquieting: they almost creep around the bedroom shared by Flora and Miss Giddens. Clayton is careful to use these movements sparingly outside the house (although it is in the garden that Miss Giddens has some of her most frightening visions). For example, in the scene where Miles is riding his pony in the park, Clayton uses a staccato montage of close-ups between the faces of Miss Giddens and the boy on the startlingly white horse to create an almost vertiginous effect. At other times, he relies on static compositions to convey the presence of evil and corruption (the grotesque statuary, the dark, looming poplars) and handles particularly well what one might call the moral climax of the film. Miss Giddens tries to make Flora admit that she sees the black figure of Miss Jessel (the dead governess) among the reeds in the lake, but the Housekeeper cannot (or dare not) see it, and so sympathises with the screaming child. This marks the point at which Miss Giddens senses that her imagination may be responsible for everything, and Clayton sums it up admirably in a long-held shot of her standing in black dress against the Gothic arches of the little pavilion, with the rain lashing the lake in the background. The contrast of black and white is also used inside Bly House, where the camera closes in repeatedly on Miss Giddens' face, which is strongly lighted against a completely black background whenever she is frightened by a sound or movement. One remembers this long-held image at the pavilion simply because it is a rarity in Clayton's work, which is generally dynamic in the literal sense of the word. The other distinctive shot of this kind is in *Room at the Top* when Joe and Susan walk over a bridge after they have made love, and Clayton does not cut for about twenty seconds while their conversation dwindles away in the distance.

Although Clayton apparently dislikes Cinemascope as a gauge, it does help to stress the spaciousness of Bly House. In the larger rooms, he resorts to a compositional device which is very prevalent in *Room at the Top:* one character (generally Miss Giddens) stands in the right foreground and another in the left background, or vice versa. This is similar to the deep-focus introduced by Renoir, but less distracting because it is only used when the two characters in the frame are engaged in conversation. Many deep-focus compositions — especially those used by Welles — contain too much for the eye to assimilate in a single image. When Clayton does use deep-focus, he succeeds because he makes it strictly subjective. In *Room at the Top,* for instance, when Alice is heartbroken by the news of Joe's impending marriage, one sees her through a gap between the customers in the local pub, drinking dejectedly about ten yards away. There is nothing in the foreground to distract one's attention, but the distant view of Alice helps to suggest her isolation and depression. The other successful visual device that Clayton employs to heighten the atmosphere is making Miss Giddens or one of the children glide into the frame from one side or the other, much as Death does in Bergman's *The Seventh Seal.*

Too often, however, the horrific scenes are spoilt with clichés — open windows with billowing curtains, thunder and lightning, harshly-chorded music, superimpositions of figures over the governess's head as she lies dreaming in her bed. And yet how else could one make a ghost story in 1961? The only respect in which the three scriptwriters (Truman Capote, John Mortimer, and William Archibald) seem to have differed from James — or tried to make his tale more fascinating and perverse — is the Freudian one. Without reading too much into individual sequences, one could easily maintain that Miss Giddens is subconsciously attracted by the spirit of Quint. This comes to a climax when she kisses Miles goodnight and realises that his kiss is that of the valet. Her conscious mind is revolted by his ardour, but subconsciously she becomes even keener to find the spirit of Quint within Miles (thus she demands to be left alone in the house with him, while the Housekeeper and Flora leave by carriage for London).

If *The Innocents* has failed to improve Clayton's stock with the critics, it has at least thrown into relief his technical prowess, and

TO PAGE 40

LETTER *from page 10*

to make basically anti-war films, they had better choose some other war. Kubrick knew what he was doing when he chose a First World War story for his anti-war film. And *Paths of Glory* is one of the few directly and genuinely anti-war pictures made since 1945.

PETER WATERMAN
Ruskin College, Oxford

Ian Johnson writes: But for Mr. Waterman's mention of Florence's frequent change of wardrobe (something I hadn't noticed, but not surprising really considering the action of the film stretches over a period of years, and that she was a wealthy woman) I should have thought he was basing his comments on the synopsis alone.

I really cannot see what he means in his first two paragraphs. Is it unusual for a film to load the dice against the villain? (What is unusual is for the film-maker to disguise the villain as the hero, as Cayatte does). And what is wrong with the Betrayed Maiden and Bereaved Mother themes being treated as "subjects", as Mr. Waterman concedes that they are? Mr. Waterman looks for logical reasons for Jean's continued love for Florence, and Roger's lack of reproach for Jean's betrayal of Helga, but in fact these are questions which shouldn't arise if you are immersed in the mood of the film, because human relationship are full of logically inexplicable details. I wonder what Mr. Waterman makes of Antonioni?

The rest of his remarks are more interesting. Mr. Waterman says he does not think the theme of the film is an important one. I think it is very important: the positive values of human dignity and the right to be left alone without being pushed around, against the morally destructive powers of nationalism and power. Moreover, Mr. Waterman's black-and-white politics are extremely debatable. I doubt whether the Free French were fighting for the inmates of the concentration camps, or for internationalism (or even, possibly, for human decency, whatever that means). And it is possible to argue (but again, the issues are none too clear — are they ever in real life?) that if we all acted like Roger, Cayatte would still be making films about humanism (or wouldn't need to), we would still be discussing his films, but there wouldn't have been a war. A real merit of "The Crossing of the Rhine" is that Cayatte fogs the issues, and forces us to think for ourselves.

But in any case, all this politics is rather unsatisfactory. What I **am** convinced of is, not that discussion of a film's political theme is irrelevant in film criticism, but that it is wrong to decide whether a film is good or bad according to our own political preconceptions. Mr. Waterman puts forward some interesting sociological views which might be important, but according to his standards any third-rate anti-German war melodrama is better than "The Crossing of the Rhine". And I think that is bad criticism.

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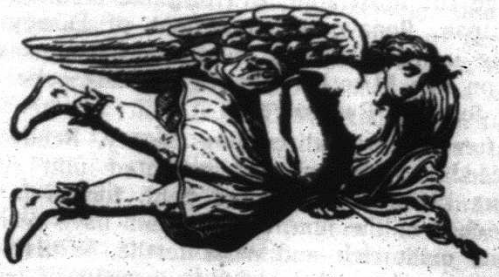

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BOOKSHELF

Discarding Disney

IT IS A RATHER SAD reflection on film criticism and public taste that the animated film has always been something of a neglected medium — to be treated as rather a curious tributary to the mainstream of the cinema. Sad because animation is by no means a sluggish by-water.

The fascination of what is usually called the "cartoon" — a rather unfortunate term because animation isn't necessarily comic, and it neglects the puppet film — is easy to see, for to the fascination of drawings and designs is brought the quite special thrill of designs that move. But for most people it goes no deeper than Tom and Jerry and Bugs Bunny: the special affinities of the animated film with art and with modern design, and its own unique qualities usually go unremarked.

That is why this new book, *Le Dessin Animé après Walt Disney* by Robert Benayoun, is such a valuable one in spreading the gospel around. In fact, unless you actually want to dabble in the techniques of making your own animated films, I should say it is the best yet. For not only does Benayoun cover every aspect of his topic with a complete thoroughness, but with an admiration and respect, and a shrewd awareness of its elusive potential.

Admiration and respect, that is, for all except Walt Disney. A justifiable exception, this, as Disney has done much to block the development of the medium. For one of the real merits of the animated film, which Disney for all his ideas of big business forgot, is that the big studio set up is largely inessential: animation can be the individual, and original, creation of one man. Benayoun's treatment of Disney is gently ironic: Disney's creations, he sums up, live on like Miss Havisham's wedding cake. (It was decayed. Remember?).

After healthily discarding Disney, Benayoun proceeds to discuss the animated film since about 1940. It is a broad field, for as in all branches of the film, recent years have seen it at its most rich and most fertile. Whilst not forgetting the popular, folksy, aspects of animated cartoons of the West — Bugs Bunny, Tom and Jerry, etc — Benayoun concentrates on the more original creations of individual artists. At times he draws comparisons between the animated film and art: Picasso and Seurat with Alexeieff, Modigliani and UPA, and so on. The illustrations are fully explained in the text, which incidentally includes a special section on the puppet film, and something called a "Postface" by André Martin, as well as a bibliography and filmography.

Unfortunately, the book was published in France nearly a year ago, so that some of the more recent achievements in the field have passed unnoticed. A carping criticism this, which is no reflection on the value of the book. But nonetheless one does feel regret that some of the more recent achievements of Biographic have not been mentioned, as well as the Hubleys' *Of Stars and Men*, Vystrcil's *A Place in the Sun*, Albert Champeaux and Pierre Watrin's *Villa mon Rêve*.

At some later date I would like to see MOTION dealing with the animated film in detail. But in any case I would suggest you forget the price (a mere 63/– — Rodney Book Services) and the deceptive slimness of this volume, and go out and buy, because it is a

Le Film Maudit

"WE DON'T SEE ENOUGH GOOD FILMS" Complaints of this kind are prevalent enough in any art but they have a particular poignancy when applied to films, because of the uniquely complex situation: the worthwhile film has to be made, it has to be shown, and it has to be noticed, and the last stage is as vital as the first, because the good film that isn't seen, the *film maudit*, is a waste of talent in more ways than one. Consider the career of such a film. A random example, one that I saw recently: *Ride Lonesome*. Randolph Scott, Karen Steele in a Western directed by Budd Boetticher; Columbia 1958, Scope, Colour (if you don't like *Ride Lonesome* there are plenty of others that fit just as well). Slipped out unobtrusively by Columbia, not shown to the press (*What's On* and the *Monthly Film Bulletin*, which do cover all new films, are of course virtually useless). I heard of Boetticher through reading a review of *Comanche Station* in *Oxford Opinion*. Then happened to discover, or guess, that he also did *Ride Lonesome*. After a year it turns up in some suburban fleapit. I like it, my friends like it. A little word-of-mouth publicity. A letter to MOTION (see last issue). Perhaps one day someone will write an article on Boetticher and the Western, and in ten years *Ride Lonesome* might even get shown at the National Film Theatre.

Vicious Circle

This dismal process not only deprives a lot of people of a lot of pleasure, it is also the waste of a healthy influence, for *Ride Lonesome*

book to own, whether you know nothing, or think you know everything, about the animated film.

It does raise one question. Will we ever get the chance to see more than a fraction of the films illustrated in this book? The circuit houses will not play them, and although some of the other distributors will acquire the odd cartoon, the general feeling seems to be that public opinion is in the main hostile to anything out of the normal run. But all the same, I've a hunch that if some enterprising continental distributor imported a worthwhile animated film, not necessarily designed for children, and promoted it right, it would probably pay off. Otherwise, perhaps it's time the National Film Theatre held another International Festival of Animated Films.

I. K. J.

"TWENTY YEARS of AMERICAN CINEMA" reviewed by CHARLES BARR

could be an antidote to the cult of the inflated, pretentious Western (*High Noon, Shane, The Big Country*) which the critics oblige the big companies by accepting. So you get the kind of vicious circle of which this is a good illustration: the critics sneer at Jerry Lewis's films, treating them on a par with Norman Wisdom's (whatever one's reaction to Jerry Lewis this is clearly ridiculous, his Tashlin films, at least, being highly inventive), therefore Paramount stop showing them to the 'long-haired boys', therefore his recent *The Ladies Man* goes round unnoticed, which is a pity (but n.b. Raymond Durgnat's review in *Films and Filming*.)

This also helps to explain why most film histories are so pathetically inadequate in their coverage of the American cinema. The chapters on modern English-speaking cinema in Arthur Knight's useful *The Liveliest Art* deal mainly with Huston, Wyler, Stevens, Zinnemann, Lean and Reed... Knight and Rotha and Manvell and co are shown only the 'mainstream' films; they build their histories and their theories around them, and come to have no interest in or response to anything else. As a result no-one is made aware of a whole class of interesting films, the class I'm talking about; there is no demand for them even by specialised audiences (Film Societies, the Everyman), so they are not seen, and there is no opportunity for people to become aware of them... Another vicious circle.

Of course I have to take it as agreed that such films do exist and are worth bothering about, films that you like or I like, that Dilys Powell and Josh Billings and *Sight and Sound* do not necessarily like, or have not heard of. At this stage the normal thing to do is to launch into a detailed attack on the Scandal of British Film Criticism, but such attacks are really too futile, because asking for these critics to show insight into the medium they are concerned with is like asking English cricket captains to show more enterprise: it simply isn't in them. Alan Dent is no more likely suddenly to see the light than Peter May is to make a sporting declaration. So one writes more in sorrow than in anger. It is a depressing business going back over all the earnest manifestoes written in the last two years, because the whole debate seems to have made not an iota of difference to anyone. Most critics seized on some evasive half-truth which could masquerade as the result of serious thinking (e.g. Substance is more important than Style or "the cinema is about the human situation, not about spatial relationships"), and returned to the job of vetting pictures for their (superficial) moral or entertainment qualities. The December issue of *Cahiers du Cinéma* has a questionnaire answered by 37 prominent French critics: patchy, but fascinating. And the most fascinating thing is to realise that no more than four or five English critics would be capable of giving a coherent answer to the questions asked (e.g. should film critics be specialists to the same extent as other critics? Should they see films more than once? Are criteria more difficult to establish for films than for other arts?).

Film Texture

These French critics don't have to bother about such red herrings as Form versus Content, because they have long ago understood that the two are not strictly distinguishable, that in a considerable film the form is part of the content — form meaning not Style with a capital S, superadded to the basic substance of a would-be-Artistic film (e.g. Tony Richardson's), but *texture*. To acknowledge that a director's meaning may be contained in the *texture* of his film, in his style — whether conscious (Antonioni, Welles) or instinctive (directors like Walsh and Boetticher, one imagines) — of telling a story or presenting a character, does not mean that you have to accept *en bloc* any particular set of judgments: the value of the *Oxford Opinion* criticism was precisely this attention to style, in the true sense, this treatment of the cinema as a poetic medium, in the true sense.

Looking again at some of Lindsay Anderson's dicta in *Sequence* and particularly in a *Sight and Sound* feature of 1958 called "The Critical Issue", one realises that, whether he likes it or not, this is exactly the new impetus in film criticism that he's been demanding, and the

only possible direction it could have taken. "In the beginning, *Sequence* was more concerned with the rediscovery and reaffirmation of the poetic quality of the cinema (I prefer the word poetic to æsthetic)..." Ford was for them a symbol of this poetic quality in the same way that Nicholas Ray is today. Most of the *Sequence* writers later became identified with 'Free Cinema' and *Sight and Sound*, and have by now abandoned criticism, having, as I see it, reached a dead end: the development of the modern cinema in a different and richer way from the Carné-Ford-Sucksdorff line left them stranded, and since then the would-be-progressive critic has been a slightly pathetic figure, a Lindsay Anderson ten years out of date, starting off vigorously enough, but soon turning sour. Current example, Derek Hill.

It was Mr. Hill, not untypically, who referred the other week to "Nicholas Ray and Joseph Losey, two American directors distinguished only for the absurd idolatry lavished upon them by the critics of *Cahiers du Cinéma* and some budding British imitators". It may be embarrassing for some critics when they actually start reading about films and discover that there are other magazines besides *Cahiers* where Ray and Losey are admired and where some shockingly un-BFI ideas are held about the cinema, and the American cinema in particular. *Cinema 62* (formerly *Cinema 61, 60*, etc.), for instance, which has a team of writers so transparently thoughtful and sincere that even Miss Houston would have difficulty in labelling them as crypto-Fascist beatniks. At present this is the best film magazine in the world, and it is four of their contributors who have compiled *Twenty Years of American Cinema.*

TWENTY YEARS OF AMERICAN CINEMA **costs 8.80 NF and is obtainable from Editions C.I.B., 7 Rue Darboy, Paris XI. It is one of the few film books that can genuinely be called indispensable.**

Jean-Pierre Coursodon, the editor, gives a useful year-by-year summary of post-1940 Hollywood, including lists of Oscar winners and b.o. champions. The central part is an index to the work of American directors, with critical summaries. Unlike *Sight and Sound*'s index to British directors, this does make it clear who is worth bothering about and who isn't: Kramer, Zinnemann, Daniel Mann and Wyler (post 1950) are not, Dwan and Walsh and Wendkos and Oswald and Boetticher are. However they do not, as *Cahiers* tends to, divide all directors into two categories, the Great and the Negligible, indeed they are almost too painstakingly fair, for although careful summaries are very valuable in the case of certain controversial or uneven talents (Oswald, Brooks, Ford), life is just too short to allow one to catch up on *all* the directors who have done something honourable, or promise to do so — the Joseph Newmans, the Richard Bartletts, the Robert D. Webbs... But this is no criticism of the authors, for whom the whole thing has been a colossal labour of love. The essay which stands best on its own as a piece of criticism is, I think, that on Ray, though it is strange to have his gypsy monstrosity *Hot Blood* picked out as the key film. The main limitation is incompleteness, which is understandable, since many important films never get distributed in France; but it would surely have been worthwhile, for reference purposes, having an index to film titles and a *complete* filmography of all directors listed. The same applies to the sections on stars and supporting actors, useful though the notes and the photographs will be found. Make your own list of 'inexplicable' omissions (no mention of Fred MacMurray, James Mason, Angie Dickinson, Shirley Jones). But the editors, who were tempted to include sections on writers, cameramen etc. as well, have deliberately sacrificed comprehensiveness to economy; and since the book seems likely to find the popular audience it deserves, one cannot blame them.

All films, incidentally, are listed under their original titles.

CLAYTON *from page 40*

has shown that his work possesses a fluidity that is just as effective and just as dazzling as that of many Nouvelle Vague films such as *Lola, Tirez Sur Le Pianiste,* and *A Double Tour.* It is very encouraging to find a director in this country who believes that the camera is to the filmmaker as the pen is to the writer. Both Fellini and Visconti, who Clayton admires a great deal, also adhere to this idea. This does not imply the fusion of form and content in his films, but only that Clayton chooses to express himself *visually* to a far greater degree than most English directors. And it is scarcely his fault if, in doing so, he muffles the psychological overtones of James's story. Let's hope that he finds a subject even more congenial to his style for his fourth film.

Acknowledgements

Compton (Lola). **Contemporary** (Les Bonnes Femmes). **International Productions — S.P.A. Cinematografice** (Les Godelureaux). **Productions A.J.Y.M.** (Le Beau Serge). **Regal International** (Rocco and his Brothers). **20th-Century Fox** (The Innocents, The James Brothers). **United Artists** (Kiss Me Deadly). **Warner-Pathe** (Al Capone, Nicholas Ray — page 25).
National Film Archive, Publications Dept. of the British Film Institute, The Federation of Film Societies and Granta (Cambridge).

UNIVERSITY FILM-MAKING

What is the matter with University film-units? Why do they so rarely produce anything of note? The problems and difficulties involved are discussed by HENRY THORESBY, a past chairman of University Film-Makers Association.

OF THE EIGHTY-FOUR FILMS shown at the Amsterdam Student Film Festival in 1960, only a handful could bear a second showing. These were the work of the east European cinema schools, and were mostly short, simple in construction and tidily made. They were, above all, polished and therefore attractive to look at.

By contrast, the British *Stratas of a City*, by the murkiness of its images and general incoherence, demonstrated the prime deficiency of the British entries: their lack of any attempt at craftmanship. The bulk of what had been shot went in, whatever the quality of the exposures.

Until our college film-units have erased their bad name and built up large bank balances, they simply cannot afford to ignore audiences and pass off their filmic errors as experimental conceptions.

At present, too, University film-units talk about themselves a great deal and do very little. What they do produce, besides being underexposed, is often silly as well as pretentious. But this unfortunate impression can be traced back to an instability and lack of continuity in these units which is reflected in their spurts of activity and sudden declines.

For there is a vicious circle in student film-making. The ingredients are the lack of experience and funds, blended with over-optimism. If there existed a little more resolution on the part of members of units, perhaps these obstacles could be overcome; but the strenuous life of the student understandably tends to distract and undermine the original sense of determination.

The course of this circle consists of three stages. Firstly, there must be the founding of a unit by a small group of enthusiasts in possession of a script. This will involve an influx of recruits, and the greater their numbers the greater the difficulty of actually producing a given piece of work, assuming that a financial grant is forthcoming.

Secondly, in the actual production of the film, the script becomes distorted and progress delayed by the sheer inexperience of the unit. Many films degenerate from serious feature productions into sixth-form melodramas or clumsy pieces of a whimsical nature. Novices in film-making are peculiarly optimistic and will attempt the most difficult surrealistic work on their first outing with a camera.

In the third stage, when the film has progressed some distance, it becomes obvious that the money is going to run out, and the production is either brought to a quick conclusion or shelved. Either way, the reputation of student film-making suffers, and grants become difficult to obtain. Obviously, few students can afford to finance their own films. Ultimately, new enthusiasm will resurrect the moribund unit, unless it has continued hamstrung by acute limitations of finance.

The war between Student Unions and film-making is nearly continuous, culminating annually in a clash at the Budget debate. The attitude of Unions is easily understood. They have a limited amount of money to distribute and it is common knowledge that the film-unit will dwindle to a group of four or five enthusiasts by the end of the session. Film-unit expenditure is necessarily high, and taking the likely standard of the finished product into account, there seems little justification for allocating so much of the budget to so few. Until student film-units can demonstrate their competence, this is understandable. But how can any standard be attained without experience of working with film?

There is an answer, simple and unpalatable. By using 8 mm film and equipment, opportunity is given to reshoot and cut ruthlessly until a deftness and polish which is now unknown appears. A film like **Rope** is so much of an exception that it may for practical purposes be neglected in this discussion. **Rope** earned money, but its principal virtue was to recover the name of British student films at the Amsterdam Festival.

The need, then, is for a steady output of well-tailored films. Public relations need more attention than experimentation. It seems impossible for units to both train recruits and produce good work unless they convert to 8 mm stock. In a country where there is no well-established film school (certainly none within the universities), it is clear that these units have a place to fill. Education in film appreciation comes from making films. Until Union and common-room prejudice are overcome, their influence on the outside world (such as might come from an exposition of the evils of non-residential colleges) or on the commercial cinema will be negligible.

If 8mm is the answer, what then are the prospects of getting the finished job shown anywhere? How good is the technical equipment available? We asked TONY WIGENS, editor of the 8-mm monthly "Cine-Camera", to comment. **See page 43**

The new realism of Resnais and Cassavetes offers a challenge to the British Cinema

The SHAPE of FILMS to COME?

by BRIAN HAMMOND

THERE HAS ALWAYS seemed to be a kind of faerie quality about French films; I recall this quite clearly from the first time I ever saw one, at the People's Palace in Mile End Road. I had bought a packet of Gauloisex and puffed away, cosmopolitan, during the screening; it was a great period. I suppose this love-hate attitude to France is a distillation of all those glasses of acid wine drunk on the "Boule Miche", the overcharging of hotel-keepers for minute rooms very near the sky and smelling of cats, the sight of the gendarmerie dragging away Algerians on grave charges of *'visage nord africain'*, the timeless, breathless nature of French driving, all laced with erotic paperbacks and Henry Miller. *Ah! Comme ils sont civilisés!* The dialogue rolled out into the People's Palace auditorium, sounding like Saxelby's "En Marche" read through at immense speed, and the production was touched everywhere with these flashes of faerie differentness.

At this time the British film industry was devoting itself to shooting a million miles of stiff-lipped Ealing comedies and muted epics about the Royal Air Force.

The French have now moved on; Robbe-Grillet, Nathalie Sarraute and others are now battering away on a level of non-comprehensibility which makes James Joyce look like a Noddy story, and the film-makers are swinging into line with all sorts of avant-garde material, huge close-ups of noses going on for minutes at a time, camera-studies of nothing, and the complete list of techniques necessary for a closer portrayal of life with all its areas of illogic, inconsequence and boredom. It is time that Britain took up the gauntlet thrown down by both Cassavetes and Resnais. This can be done comparatively painlessly by scripting for existing stars and using familiar British settings as a vehicle for plot-lines of serious social comment and the expression of basic social problems. Perhaps a suggestion or two might help at this stage.

A possible story line might begin with Peter Cushing, his forehead neatly bolted all round, sitting in a gloomy castle in the middle of a Scots forest. He has been knocked up in the workshops by an eccentric laird of scientific bent some thirty years before, who then died in a hunting accident leaving behind no relatives and only one retainer. Peter Cushing (Mac), our male lead, has led a solitary and introspective existence to the point where the story picks up; he is an aimless, beat intellectual, getting his only kicks from shunning society, brooding over the hide-bound library the laird left behind him, and blasting the local cats to pieces with a twelve bore shotgun. He is out of step with his generation. His only communication is with the retainer, Beppo, a hunchback of unprepossessing appearance, with whom he exchanges long characterisation arguments about the nature of the universe.

Into this static situation steps a blonde (Betty) in search of her soul and with strong tendencies towards nymphomania; any rising young actress would do for this. Her car, in which she has jumped after a wild party in Canonbury in an attempt to escape from it all by an all-night drive to Scotland, has broken down; she comes to the great mansion and pulls the bell-rope in the hope of finding somebody who knows something about carburettors. Mac, recognising that here is a person of a totally different calibre from the manservant, detains her in the castle.

Over the next weeks a delicate relationship builds up between them, mainly portrayed in montage and snatches of murmured dialogue; for example, a prolonged shot of Mac's twisted, man-made hand resting shyly on her beringed and nail-varnished fist; a moving scene when he takes her down to show her the laboratories, and a glimpse of the face of Beppo looking after them, the tears in his eyes highlighting his feelings about the loss of his employer's interest and his hopeless wish for the feminine companionship from which he is eternally barred by his low birth and hideous appearance.

The affair has moved to the stage of romps in the grounds under the moonlight, with a pulsating jazz background, when a new factor is introduced into the situation. One morning there arrives at the castle a travelling salesman of encyclopedias, played perhaps by Norman Wisdom. A middle-class ex-public school boy, who has sunk over the years into a sort of Graham Greene bog of failure and diminished ambitions, this job for the Scottish end of his firm is his last chance. He is repulsed by Mac, and on turning sadly to go into a bleak and fruitless future he slips on the moss-covered stairs and falls, breaking his leg in five places. A spark of human feeling, as a result of his relationship with Betty, stirs Mac to compassion. (Close up here of his face and the subtle play of emotions beneath his fringe of bolts). Finally he orders Beppo to bring the salesman (Beverly Hythe) in.

The triangle situation develops. Beverly has all the advantages of his early background and good breeding. He and Betty have friends in common. He lacks mobility, because of his multiple fracture, but in all else he scores heavily over Mac, the victim of his

nascent good nature, who reverts to brooding and blasting at the cats. There is an opening here for a torrid, realistic bedroom scene, dealing frankly with the practical difficulties of making love when one of the participants has a leg in a home-made plaster cast.

At this stage, with the tempo of the jazz background speeding up all the time, the pathos of the relationship between all of them (including Beppo, who has now developed a hopeless homosexual fixation on Beverley, and brings him beef tea, sighing, at intervals of twenty minutes) is building up to a terrible tension. The conflict between modernity and Mac's solitary way of living reaches its climax when Betty orders a television set from a mail order company. By this time Beverley is convalescing, and they are sitting together in the great stone drawing room with the set flickering away and the tension growing. After a huge emotional flare-up, Mac strides across to the set to switch it off, in a rejection of both art and life. But as his fingers close on the apparatus a sudden news flash comes on; a monster has been sighted off the coast of Scotland, and is now heading inland. They turn off the set and look at each other — the individuals problems of each of them are moved into the wider context of the world at large and society in general. In the silence that ensues, a mad stamping and whinnying and snuffling is to be heard outside.

From here on the development speeds up; the Army and Navy arrive, together with Terry Thomas and David Niven; there is social conflict provided by the local fisher folk, led by Peter Sellers in a thick jersey, who wish to preserve the monster as a tourist attraction. Beppo is trodden on by the monster, which disposes of his problem. Beverley decides to turn it all in and join the Territorials in order to win his self-respect. Mac saves the nation by devising an electrical machine to slay the monster in the laboratory, and Betty realises that her love for her artificial boy-friend is real after all.

However, to avoid the happy ending which is anathema to a realistic film, it is discovered, after the nuptials of Betty and Mac have taken place, that Mac has unfortunately been left unfinished by the laird, who had a rather puritanical attitude to that sort of thing, and the fade out comes with both of them staring across the carcass of the dead monster out on to the misty, turbulent grey waters of the sea, broodingly left to face this new problem — together.

Now if Christopher Fry and Wolf Mankowitz could get together on the script, we might be able to see some rushes fairly shortly.

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CAMEO - POLY SOON

FILM - MAKING *from page 41*

IF YOU WANT to make films and stay solvent, one answer certainly is to make them on 8mm. There are plenty of good cameras between £30 for a second hand Bolex with a focusing lens to £90 for a shop-soiled Camex reflex with zoom lens. The resolution of film stock has alway been a limiting factor, technically, but Kodachrome II was made available on 8mm spools from its introduction last year, and has changed the whole 8mm scene with its added speed, latitude and sharpness. In black and white there is a wide range of different speed stocks to choose from, with both Adox and Perutz available up to 400 ASA.

What do you do with your film when you've shot it? I've shown a film in a village hall on a six foot screen to two hundred people and the quality was just dandy. Kodachrome II, that was. The BBC have projected some 8mm films through a lash-up telecine arrangement at Alexandra Palace, but normally prefer to blow-up originals to 16mm. This does emphasise any flaws. However, the point is that good 8mm films are being shown on television. There is also an Cirse arc projector at present at the National Film Theatre and a couple of shows have been given there with all 8 mm originals. The isolated film doesn't have much hope of a showing, and grouping in a programme (such as winners in a competition) increases the 8mm producer's chances. For film-makers who are beginning to suspect that competition winners usually have to measure up to a common standard of artistic mediocrity allied to superficial technical proficiency, "Cine Camera" magazine has formed an 8mm Experimental Film Register. Films which measure up to its more liberal standards are copied, and the resulting programmes will be made available to a wide variety of audiences. Details from 161 Fleet Street, London, E.C.4.

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